

## TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now on another matter, Mr. President, Members of the Senate are continuing to work hard to deliver much needed tax reform for families and small businesses. Yesterday, Senators, members of the administration, and tax reform advocates met here in the Capitol to discuss a mutual vision for relief. They shared the goals of simplicity, fairness, and economic growth. These are the same goals I have, they are the same goals the House wrote into its legislation, they are the same goals the President asked us to consider, and most importantly, they are the goals shared by many Americans across the political spectrum. So we are working together to get this done.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity, and it will help us create jobs and boost the economy, while closing special interest loopholes at the same time. We can do all of this through tax reform.

Today, the House Ways and Means Committee will continue to mark up its legislative proposal. I would like to once again commend Chairman BRADY for his good work on the House plan. The hearings this week are building momentum to accomplish our goals for the American people.

Soon, the Senate Finance Committee, under the leadership of Senator HATCH, will release its own plan for tax reform. Working through an open committee process, the committee will ultimately bring tax reform legislation to the floor. I am exceedingly grateful to Chairman HATCH for his continued leadership of the Finance Committee.

As we continue to advance tax reform, I would urge our Democratic colleagues to join us. In recent years, many prominent Democrats have expressed support for tax reform. Since then, the need for tax reform hasn't changed at all. The American people haven't stopped hurting either. The only thing that changed was the President. So I hope our colleagues will put partisanship aside and work with us in a serious way to help us deliver real relief to families. I hope they will help us take more money out of Washington's pockets and put more money in the pockets of the middle class. That is the aim of this tax reform effort, and we are going to keep working until we accomplish it.

## RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

## CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

## EXECUTIVE SESSION

## EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the Robb nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Peter B. Robb, of Vermont, to be General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board for a term of four years.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

## AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had a very important hearing last week regarding the 2001 authorization for use of military force, the law that serves as the legal underpinning for the war against al-Qaida and the Taliban. I am grateful to our witnesses, Secretaries Mattis and Tillerson, for making themselves available to the members of the committee and for the straightforward and honest answers they provided to us.

As we have gotten further and further away from the September 11 attacks that resulted in the passage of the 2001 AUMF, I have urged Congress to take a fresh look at that authorization. When four soldiers died recently in Niger, I think most Americans—and even some Members of Congress—were shocked to learn that we even had troops in that country. Our troops were not there under the auspices of the 2001 AUMF, but considering that they were reportedly ambushed and killed at the hands of an Islamic State affiliate, questions have been raised about where our forces are and where they are at war with terrorists versus when they are simply conducting train-and-equip or other missions of that sort.

It was encouraging that nearly every member of the Foreign Relations Committee was in attendance at that hearing where the witnesses testified that the administration believes it has ample authority to prosecute the war on terrorism and does not need a new AUMF.

I can't say I was surprised to hear that testimony. No administration, Republican or Democratic, will ever willingly cede the broad authority given to the executive branch 3 days after the September 11 attack. If they were to say that we need new authorization, they would be conceding that they haven't been acting with authorization all this time. So they are never going to say that we need a new AUMF.

What has surprised me is that there are Members of this body, the Senate, who are content to let this 16-year old authorization remain in place. Some have even suggested that any updates to the AUMF can be made using the appropriations process. Are we really going to start using policy riders on annual spending bills to approve of sending troops into harm's way? We

rarely even vote on individual spending bills anymore, let alone controversial policy riders to those spending bills. Are we truly willing to leave it to the members of the Appropriations Committee to update a law that has put our servicemembers into harm's way, particularly those of us on the authorizing committee, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee? I hope that we more jealously guard our prerogatives than that.

Our inaction on updating the 2001 law has already relegated the role of the Senate in authorizing force to that of a cog in the feedback loop. I would submit that we in the Senate ought to aspire to be more than that.

For 16 years, Congress has been all too willing to let successive administrations use those broad authorities to address new threats and to deploy U.S. troops to new places. Beyond Afghanistan, our troops have deployed all over the world, to places such as Yemen, the Philippines, Somalia, and Libya to fight al-Qaida and its affiliates.

We have also sent forces to Syria and back to Iraq to defeat ISIS, a group that didn't even exist in 2001. We need to fight terrorism overseas, and I am not suggesting that the United States should shy away from these battles. To the contrary, I believe Congress should do its duty in supporting these missions by voting to authorize them.

In the 16 years since the passage of the 2001 AUMF, approximately 300 Members of the House who voted on it are no longer with that Chamber. In the Senate, of those Senators who voted on the original AUMF, only 23 Senators remain in their seats today. That leaves approximately 70 percent of the entire Congress that has never cast a vote to authorize military force abroad. Yet, over the years, deployments have continued to new places, combating new foes.

The United States is strongest when we speak with one voice. Therefore, Congress must have some buy-in on these missions. Our allies and other adversaries need to know that the war on terrorism has the support of Congress. More importantly, our troops need to know that Congress is behind them.

I know the concept of passing a new, updated AUMF is a tricky one. This is not a conventional war against a sovereign nation in which victory is easily defined. Instead, we are fighting an ideological enemy that has no sovereignty and which, over the years, has moved all over the world, resulting in many splinter factions that could change their name at any time with ease.

This new kind of war requires a new kind of authorization, one that allows Congress's continued buy-in and increases its oversight. Right now, we have neither of these.

After working on this issue for several years, Senator TIM KAINE and I have introduced legislation that we think gets us in the right place. Our bill would authorize the use of military force against al-Qaida and the Taliban

and ISIS. It authorizes force against affiliates of those groups and requires the President to report to Congress when he initiates force against a new group he designates as being associated with al-Qaida, the Taliban, or ISIS. Military operations can begin as soon as the President has notified Congress. There is no time-lapse required.

If Congress doesn't agree with the President's designation, our bill allows a 60-day timeframe during which any Member can bring a resolution of disapproval to the floor under expedited procedures, and adoption of such measure by both Houses would result in the end of military operations against that group.

Our bill adopts the same process with regard to geography to allow Congress to disapprove of military operations in a particular country. I recognize that traditional declarations of war and other authorizations of military force haven't referred to a particular geographic area in which operations can take place. But all of our previous military engagements were against sovereign nations with armed forces, not terrorist groups that can pop up in any country at any time.

If Congress is going to authorize the use of force, we ought to know in which countries U.S. troops are operating. Requiring the President to notify Congress when he begins operations against one of these terrorist groups in a new country is an important check on the executive branch to ensure there is no overreach.

The bar for disapproving the President's decision is high—appropriately so. It would require two-thirds of the House and the Senate to disagree with the President on his decisions with regard to new associated forces or new countries.

Right now, Congress has very little to say over who or where our military fights. The only option available is to cut off appropriations, and history has demonstrated that simply is not realistic or appropriate.

The most recent example of this, as some of my colleagues will recall, was in 2011, when the Obama administration joined the NATO operation to help rebels in Libya topple Muammar Qadhafi. The administration never made the case to Congress as to what U.S. interests were served by U.S. involvement. As a result, many Members on both sides of the aisle publicly opposed our intervention in Libya.

Yet, when the clock ran out on the time constraints set forth in the War Powers Resolution, Congress did not turn off appropriations because we can't just pull the rug out from underneath servicemembers when they are in harm's way overseas. The "turning off appropriations" approach simply hasn't worked in the past and is not likely to work in the future.

We need real congressional buy-in and oversight over a conflict that has morphed considerably since 2001—and which we are now being told is

morphing to a new continent. S.J. Res. 43 gives us just that.

I should note that the bill also includes a 5-year sunset. The sunset is not intended to serve as a notice that the war on terrorism will end in 5 years. It is there to require Congress to put its skin in the game by voting on authorizing force.

The administration has signaled its objection to this provision. They think that the war on terrorism could be undermined if terrorists think they just have to wait us out.

I worry more that the lack of congressional buy-in undermines the war right here at home. Seventy percent of Congress has no skin in the game at all. We are free to criticize the President, whether the President is Republican or Democrat. That is not right.

We ought to have responsibility here. We are the article I branch. We are the branch tasked with declaring war and authorizing use of force. We shouldn't shirk our responsibility. We can't let history repeat itself and go for another 16 years without voting for the use of force against terrorists. That is why I support a sunset on any new or updated AUMF.

Perhaps the best feature of the Flake-Kaine measure is that it is bipartisan. That is an essential feature. I think we can all agree that passing an updated AUMF along party lines is perhaps the only thing worse than letting the status quo remain. I commend the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Senator CORKER, for signaling that we will move ahead with the markup of the new AUMF.

I think Flake-Kaine is a great start, but I am under no illusion that the process of putting a bill together that can garner widespread, bipartisan support will be an easy one. But the longer we wait, the higher the risk becomes that we will render ourselves irrelevant when it comes to authorizing force. That is a risk the Senate and Congress should not take.

I yield back.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REPUBLICAN TAX PLAN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, over the past decade, the American economy has generated enormous wealth for wealth holders but, painfully, less work and less pay—fewer good-paying jobs—for workers. Average folks are having a harder time keeping up with the ever-rising costs as the rich get richer and corporate stocks soar.

Our economy would surely benefit from the kind of tax reform that gives small businesses and working Americans a break, while asking the wealthiest among us to pay their fair share. "Their share" doesn't mean they are doing something illegal; it simply means that as wealth goes up and so much money agglomerates to the top, for the good of the society, the wealthiest should pay more.

Unfortunately, the Republican Party has decided to pursue a partisan tax

bill that would spin our economy even further out of whack, lavishing tax giveaways on the wealthy and corporate America, while raising taxes on millions of middle-class families over 10 years.

A New York Times analysis found that next year, the House Republican tax plan would cause taxes to go up on one-third of all middle-class families. Those are families who make—I believe it is between \$56,000 and \$150,000. One out of three in that middle-class, upper middle-class group is going to pay more in taxes, while those at the highest end get huge breaks. By 2026, taxes would go up on nearly half of all middle-class families.

I want to salute someone I almost never agree with—Senator CRUZ. At least yesterday, he had the courage of his convictions to say that no middle-class person should pay more, even in New York and California. But that is not the case with this bill. Large numbers of people throughout the country will pay more. Large numbers of middle-class people and people struggling to the middle class will pay more.

So when Speaker RYAN says that under the House plan "Everyone enjoys a tax cut all across the board," as he did yesterday, he is fibbing. I really want to use the "L" word, but to be nice, I won't. But Speaker RYAN, explain to us how you can say with a straight face: "Everyone enjoys a tax cut all across the board."

Every independent analysis and the more honest Republicans say that some middle-class people—a good number of middle-class people—get a tax increase. So Speaker RYAN, take it back. Start telling the truth about your bill. We know you are under pressure, but you have always been an honorable man, and this tax bill is tying you into a pretzel when it comes to telling the truth about it.

Look at what is done here. The personal exemption, which benefits large families, is gone. Yes, the standard deduction doubles, but if you have four, five, six children, you still pay more, even before they start whacking your State and local deductibility or your college loan deductibility or your healthcare deductibility.

Stunningly, the deduction for catastrophically high medical expenses is also gone, meaning that among the hardest hit under this plan would be some of the most vulnerable taxpayers. Eight million Americans deduct their out-of-pocket medical expenses because they are over 10 percent of their income. They plan their finances around this deduction. These families have someone with a chronic condition—maybe an elderly parent who has Alzheimer's, maybe a family with a young kid who has cancer.

I met a lady at the airport yesterday. Her name was Bridget. I didn't know who she was. She came over to me pleading. There was sadness in her eyes. She said: My son needs an orphan drug. It is very expensive. If I can't deduct the expenses, I don't know what I

am going to do. I won't be able to afford the drug. How can our Republican colleagues be so heartless and cruel? I know that you want to reduce taxes on corporations, but why do you have to do it at Bridget's expense?

Of course, the House bill takes an ax to State and local deductibility, a bedrock middle-class deduction that affects nearly every State but hits high tax States, like Virginia, the hardest.

Any House Republican who watched the returns in the Virginia elections last night must be shaken by the overwhelming Democratic turnout in suburban areas. According to pollsters, the No. 1 issue was healthcare, and this deduction goes. But overall, suburban Virginia said no to the Republican way. Suburban families will be the ones hit hardest by the elimination of State and local deductions in States like Virginia but also in Washington, New Jersey, California, Illinois, Minnesota, and Colorado.

Just last night, we learned from reporting that the Senate bill is likely to go even further regarding the State and local deduction—full repeal. There are some from my State in New York saying: Well, we have a compromise. A, the compromise still eliminates three-fourths of the deduction, but, B, that compromise is going bye-bye. The Senate is going to get rid of it. You can be sure it won't come back in a conference committee.

So I say to my House colleagues, particularly those from suburban districts: Stop the elimination of the State and local deduction now before it is too late. If it happens and you vote yes on this bill, you will be to blame. There is no way to duck and cover behind the SALT compromise any longer because the SALT tax writers have made clear that they want to repeal it entirely in the Senate. Because of the stricter Senate budget rules, the Senate language is likely to win out over the House language.

Make no mistake about it, a full repeal of the State and local deduction is coming down the pike one way or the other. Voting to advance the GOP bill is a vote to fully repeal State and local deductibility. I say to my Republican friends from all those suburban districts where a high percentage of people use the State and local deduction: If you think the results in Virginia and New Jersey were terrible for you, wait until you pass a bill that raises taxes on large swaths of middle-class families in your district.

The debate over the State and local deduction is illustrative of the central problem my Republican friends have with their tax bill. Every time you pull in one direction and change something to solve a problem, you have to push in another direction, and you end up creating a new one. It is like pushing on a balloon.

Just this morning, Speaker RYAN said the phaseout of middle-class deductions would never happen. They are only there to "game the Senate rules."

Well, if there is no phaseout, the real cost of the bill will be much higher. I say to my Senate friends who have talked about making sure we don't let the deficit go out of control that Ryan is saying we are going to let the deficit go out of control and game the Senate rules because the phaseout of middle-class deductions will not happen. If there is no real phaseout, the real cost of the bill will be much higher. It is a tough pill to swallow to anyone in this setting on the Republican side who believes in deficit reduction and who believes about \$1.5 trillion—their rule—is about as high as you can go.

All of this is because our Republican colleagues are rushing this bill through. Something like this takes care. It takes hearings. It takes discussion. It takes experts. It takes affected groups all weighing in. That takes a while. That is how it is supposed to work. That is how the Founding Fathers wanted it to work. That is how we did it with the last successful major tax reform bill in 1986. I was there, and I know.

To rush a bill of this magnitude through the Congress in a span of a few weeks, with only one party doing the work, is reckless, it is irresponsible, and it will lead to a very bad result. It is why our Republican colleagues have such problems.

I repeat my plea to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. Take a step back and consider doing tax reform the right way—bipartisan, through the committees, input from both sides. We have shown, as in healthcare, when we try, we can work together. The Senator from New Hampshire is on the floor. She was one of the leaders in that.

Earlier this year, we came to a good budget deal. Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAY put together a reasonable compromise on healthcare. We can do it again on tax reform. We Democrats want to do real reform, but our Republican friends must abandon this partisan, secretive, reckless process that will lead to no good for them and for the country and come to the table with Democrats.

One final point on the matter, Republicans repeatedly promised that the \$1.5 trillion reduction in the corporate tax rate proposed by the Ryan-McConnell tax plan will lead the average American family to receive a \$4,000 raise. Yet corporate profits are already at record highs. Wages are relatively stagnant. So color us skeptical that showering corporations with new tax brackets that will result in them having even more money will end up creating higher wages for workers. Far more likely what it will create is another round of stock buybacks and dividends, which, by and large, benefit corporate CEOs and the wealthy.

You don't have to take it from me. David Marberger is the executive vice president and CFO—chief financial officer—of Conagra, which I believe is a major Fortune 500 company. Here is what he told his shareholders this fall,

the CFO of Conagra: "In terms of if there is a corporate tax reduction and there's more cash, we bounce back to our capital allocation"—more stock buybacks.

Republicans think a corporate tax cut without guardrails would boost wages, and we disagree. Later this morning, Democrats will urge our Republican colleagues to put their money where their mouth is and prove us wrong. We will be offering an amendment that would snap back taxes to the old corporate rate if corporations actually fail to boost their workers' wages. It is that simple. Put your money where your mouth is. The only thing you are hanging your hat on, on this bill, which so hurts so many middle-class people is, well, everyone will get a big wage increase because we are reducing the corporate rate. We challenge you to accept our amendment. If the wages don't go up, the corporate decrease in taxes is repealed.

We are simply telling Republicans, don't write checks to corporations that their employees can't cash. If Republicans fail to support this amendment, they will confirm that their tax bill is a farce. They really don't believe it, when it comes to boosting wages for working Americans.

Mr. President, one final word on the nomination of Mr. Robb to the NLRB. The NLRB protects workers' rights to form or join unions, bargain collectively with their employers, and act concertedly for mutual aid or protection. It is not clear to me, from reviewing Mr. Robb's background, that he believes in the mission of the agency.

In his experience as a labor and employment lawyer, he has defended companies against workers' unfair labor practice allegations, age and sex discrimination charges, class action age claims, and wage claims. The website of Mr. Robb's law firm brags about his efforts to delay and defeat union organizing at the Millstone Power Station in Connecticut. He was the lead counsel on the notorious Reagan-era case, which decertified the air traffic controllers' union. That resulted in President Reagan firing 11,000 traffic controllers and barring them from Federal service.

The general counsel for the NLRB sets the priority cases and determines when to bring charges against employers. It is a crucial role. Peter Robb's record shows he is not up to this job, and he will not defend workers in an agency designed to defend workers.

I will be voting no and urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION  
MODERNIZATION AND ENFORCEMENT ACT

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, it is hard to read or to listen to the news these days without hearing about Russia's interference in our American democracy, its influence peddling, and about the misinformation that has

been spreading on social media. I have bipartisan legislation that would address an aspect of this. This legislation is cosponsored by Senator TODD YOUNG, and it is legislation that would give law enforcement the tools they need to create greater transparency about foreign individuals and entities that are operating in the United States in the interest of other governments. It would make it easier for the public to better track information they are receiving, particularly from governments that are hostile to the United States.

This bill would give the Department of Justice necessary authority to investigate potential violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which is also known as FARA. We have heard a lot about that. This was legislation that was passed during the thirties, as there was fear about the rise of Nazism and Hitler in Germany and the effort to spread propaganda in the United States.

This would allow the American public to clearly trace where information is coming from and who is paying for it. I think, in this age of misinformation, that is especially important to the public.

At a time when our law enforcement officials, foreign policy experts, and leaders continue to grapple with the extent of Russia's intrusion into our democratic elections, this legislation is more urgent than ever. The need for this legislation is perhaps most clearly demonstrated by the case of Russian propaganda networks like RT America and Sputnik International. Both networks continually propagate and share content and programming that are designed to very subtly confuse and influence audiences worldwide. If you have ever listened to either of those channels, you will know there is just this subtle difference in how they present information.

In the United States, RT America is available on cable TVs across the country. It is considered to be one of the most high-profile assets in Vladimir Putin's vast \$1.4 billion propaganda machine.

According to an assessment made public by the U.S. intelligence community in January, RT is the Kremlin's "principal international outlet," and it is integral to Russia's information warfare operations across the globe. The Kremlin selects the staff for RT and closely supervises RT's coverage, including disinformation and false news stories designed to undermine our democracy. If you have any question about that, watch RT here. It is on the cable network here in the DC area.

RT News has publicly boasted that it can dodge our laws by claiming to be financed by a nonprofit organization and not by the Russian Government. Recently, the Department of Justice asked RT America to, in fact, register as a foreign agent. RT rejected an entirely reasonable request from the Justice Department to respect our laws. They refused to register.

How did we respond? Well, we continued to allow RT America to spread its disinformation and false narratives. This is unacceptable. We responded that way because we don't have the teeth we need in the law to be able to enforce it. That is what my legislation with Senator YOUNG will do. That is why it is so important. It would strengthen FARA by giving the Department of Justice authority to compel foreign organizations to produce documentation to confirm funding sources and foreign connections. This new investigative authority was requested by the Department of Justice, and it is supported by the Government Accountability Office, the Sunlight Foundation, and the Project on Government Oversight. This is a good government piece of legislation.

In fact, if this authority that we have in our legislation were in place today, the Justice Department could immediately investigate RT America and publicly expose its ties to the Kremlin. In the absence of such authority, all the Justice Department can do is ask RT to voluntarily adhere to FARA regulations and hope the propaganda outlet complies. What are the odds of that? Pretty slim. Clearly, based on RT's refusal to comply with FARA, the Kremlin is well aware of the limitations that are inherent in our law.

As we wait for this commonsense legislation to move forward, the Kremlin, RT America, and Sputnik continue to wield their harmful propaganda and attempt to influence the American public.

Since the publication of the intelligence community's January report on Russia's interference in our 2016 Presidential election, we have learned that Moscow spent millions of dollars buying ads on social media sites and search engines, often using the very clips that had been aired by RT on its YouTube channel.

Last week, representatives of American social media companies testified before Congress and illustrated the lengths the Kremlin went in order to deceptively spread divisive propaganda, all seemingly without a trace or any clear indication about the origins of these ads and RT's news blasts.

The misinformation included numerous reports run by RT News on supposed U.S. election fraud and voting. So they spread, and they clearly intended to spread confusion about our elections in 2016 to try and encourage people to believe our elections don't work, to undermine our election process. They talked about machine vulnerabilities. They claimed the results of U.S. elections could not be trusted and did not reflect the people's will. Sadly, too many people saw those stories and believed they were real.

These are not just random examples of fake news. These stories are part and parcel of a broader influence campaign designed and directed by the Kremlin's leadership and pedaled by government-funded trolls in St. Petersburg and

other front organizations. So in the same way that Russia is building up its military force, its navy, its ability to operate in space, and its missile program, it has also built up its propaganda campaign in ways that are designed to undermine Western democracies. If we don't pay attention to this, then shame on us.

We are, of course, a resilient democracy. We are confident that our values and institutions will prevail in the free marketplace of ideas. Our Constitution, unlike Russia's, protects the right of individuals and organizations to spread Russian viewpoints, disinformation, and, even, outright lies. But no organization, including RT America or any other front outlet for a country that is hostile to the United States, has the right to conceal a foreign funding source and thumb its nose at requests from our Department of Justice.

The American people have a right to know if RT America is a Russian propaganda organization that takes its direction from the Kremlin. They have a right to know who is funding those programs and what kind of misinformation they are spreading.

To that end, I urge my colleagues to put an end to the Kremlin's charade by supporting the Foreign Agents Registration Modernization and Enforcement Act. Let's give the Department of Justice the tools it needs to investigate and expose RT America and to fight back against the Kremlin's interference in our democracy.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULIVAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### HONORING OUR VETERANS

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate the courageous service and selfless sacrifice of our Nation's veterans.

Honoring our veterans is one of the greatest privileges I have as a Senator, which is why I often attend celebrations in Arkansas to acknowledge and salute some of the brave men and women who have served our Nation in uniform.

I recently had the pleasure to recognize the service and valor of 15 Arkansas veterans during the Arkansas Military Veterans' Hall of Fame induction ceremony. The class of 2017 inductees comes from all across Arkansas. These veterans served in conflicts ranging from World War II through the War on

Terror. Together, they have earned some of our Nation's most prestigious honors and commendations, including the Purple Heart, the Bronze Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Legion of Merit, and the Silver Star Medal for gallantry.

I also had the opportunity to present three Arkansas veterans with the medals and commendations they had earned when I attended the Veterans Day celebration in Fort Smith, AR. I am proud of the work that we do to obtain the service medals and recognition that these heroes have earned.

We have also worked hard to honor the efforts of Mr. Errol Severe, of Eureka Springs, AR, as he strives to preserve and promote the role of joint service aviation cadets in the 20th century. Mr. Severe, an Air Force veteran, operates the Aviation Cadet Museum, which is the only museum in the United States that exists exclusively to celebrate the teamwork, collaboration, patriotism, and courage of the individuals who trained for and fought in the national aviation effort from 1917 to 1965.

As we recognize our veterans and honor the sacrifice and heroism of those who have been called to serve our Nation in uniform, we must recommit ourselves to fighting on their behalf. As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am committed to honoring the promise made to our veterans.

We have made tremendous progress during this Congress. In June, President Trump signed the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act. This strengthens accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs by allowing the VA to dismiss bad employees while protecting those who expose wrongdoing.

We are also continuing to improve the Choice Act. Earlier this year, we hosted listening sessions with Arkansas veterans to obtain their input on the strengths and the weaknesses of the program, as Congress continues to expand access to adequate healthcare options for veterans.

In addition, we enhanced the post-9/11 GI bill benefits to increase educational opportunities. I am proud to have played a role in crafting this law, along with my colleague from Oregon, Senator WYDEN. I am pleased that he can join me on the floor to recognize the importance of the provision we have championed for several years to fix an oversight that prevented combat-injured members of the National Guard and Reserve from receiving the same GI bill benefits as Active-Duty military members. This is a great example of Senators on both sides of the aisle working together to get things done.

Fixing this clear oversight in the law that unfairly penalized wounded and injured servicemembers and kept them from accruing educational benefits they rightly earned while in recovery was a priority for both of us because

these men and women deserved better. To correct this injustice, we introduced legislation earlier this year, as well as in the last Congress, and I am pleased that it was included in the comprehensive GI reform bill that was signed into law this summer.

While we have made improvements, there is still more that needs to be done, including the expansion of VA services for female veterans. I encourage my colleagues to support the Deborah Sampson Act to address these concerns, and I urge VA Secretary Shulkin to implement reforms written in the bill that don't require congressional action. Our work must continue.

Today, my colleague from Indiana, Senator DONNELLY, and I will introduce legislation to allow veterans who served in Thailand during the Vietnam war era the opportunity to prove toxic exposure in order to qualify for VA benefits.

Let me take one more opportunity to thank our veterans and their families. This country made a promise to our veterans that we must live up to, and I am proud to be able to work for them to ensure that we follow through with our commitment.

The men and women who put their lives on the line in defense of our country deserve our undying gratitude. They also deserve our support when they transition back into civilian life, which is why we must support efforts to improve their health, their ability to further their education needs, and to pursue their dreams, just as they fought to make that possible for their fellow Americans. That sentiment is shared throughout this Chamber. For all of our disagreements in Washington, we truly do come together in support of our veterans. That is one area of agreement.

I thank Senator WYDEN for his leadership to ensure equal treatment of education benefits for wounded guardsmen and reservists. I was very proud to work with him in support of this effort, and I look forward to working with him in the future.

Our guardsmen and reservists are called to defend and protect our Nation, exactly like Active-Duty members. So it is only right that they receive the same GI bill benefits.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

#### RECOGNIZING THE NEBRASKA NATIONAL GUARD

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the men and women of the Nebraska National Guard. For more than 150 years, the Nebraska National Guard has been protecting our State and keeping our Nation safe.

Established in 1854, the Guard predates the founding of the State of Nebraska by 12 years, and those who serve in its ranks today carry on a proud tradition. Whenever the Nation calls, Nebraska Guard men and women have been at the leading edge, responding in times of military need and national crisis.

When the shadow of fascism spread across Europe in World War II, Nebraska's 134th Infantry Regiment was there to bring the light of democracy back to the continent, liberating the French city of Saint-Lo from Nazi occupation.

When terrorists struck on September 11, the Nebraska National Guard was there to answer the call. In the time since, over 10,000 Nebraska Guard soldiers and airmen have deployed to fight the War on Terror and serve in defense of our Nation. This means that in the last 16 years, there have been only 3 days when every Nebraska soldier and airman was at home with their loved ones. Saying no is not part of the culture of the Nebraska National Guard. When the Nation calls, there is no hesitation. They go where the mission requires them to go.

At this very moment, we can find Nebraska soldiers and airmen deployed all across the globe, protecting our great Nation. Whether it is the dozens of National Guard men and women who are currently conducting detainee operations at Guantanamo Bay or those preparing to deploy next year to key positions in the Pacific and the Middle East, our Guard stands ready to answer the call.

The Guard is also playing an important role in working with our allies abroad. Since 1993, the Nebraska National Guard has been linked with the Czech Republic through the State Partnership Program. As Eastern Europe emerged from the heavy hand of communism, the Nebraska National Guard was there working side by side with their military to collaborate, share, and assist, forging a lasting bond that remains strong to this day. This year marks the 25th anniversary of that partnership, and we are all extremely proud of the work our Guard is doing to help bring our democracies together.

That spirit of service extends to their operations here in the homeland as well. When hurricanes so tragically struck our neighbors in Texas, Florida, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, the Nebraska Guard was there to help. The numbers speak for themselves. In Texas, they rescued 461 people and delivered 142,000 pounds of cargo, 6,000 pounds of bottled water, and 1,000 pounds of medical supplies. During Hurricane Irma, 102 members participated in an aviation task force for support operations. Right now, 58 soldiers and airmen are providing assistance to the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

The scope of their response to these disasters is a testament to their dedication and showcases the flexibility of the Guard's mission. Whether it is responding to domestic emergencies, overseas combat, or reconstruction missions, these men and women are there to respond with speed, efficiency, and strength.

One of the most impressive things about the Nebraska National Guard is that these are regular, everyday citizens who decided to answer the call to serve. They are our neighbors, our

friends, our spouses, sons and daughters, ordinary Nebraskans from every background who decided to put on the uniform and make a difference. That is why I am so honored to have a group of the Nebraska National Guard's men and women visiting Washington today. I wish to take this opportunity to personally thank them, their families, and loved ones who support them, and all of our National Guard soldiers and airmen for their good service. The Nebraska National Guard has seen a lot of change in its history, but one thing remains the same: They stand ready to serve.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

#### GI BILL FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, one of the great privileges of this job and the honor of representing Oregon in the U.S. Senate is seeing the way Oregonians of all backgrounds and beliefs come together to support those who wear or have worn the uniform of the U.S. military. When it comes to honoring our veterans, Oregonians and so many across the country think in terms of patriotism, not politics and certainly not partisanship. There is not a Democratic or a Republican way to support our veterans; there is an American way.

Recently, I was very pleased to join Senator MORAN and Senator TESTER to introduce bipartisan legislation that would expand the presumption to veterans exposed to Agent Orange in the Korean Demilitarized Zone. The VA currently presumes that veterans who served in the Korean DMZ from 1968 to 1971 were exposed to Agent Orange, but there is evidence that veterans were exposed to toxins all the way back to 1967. Our bipartisan bill would extend the presumption date back, making it easier for veterans to apply for and receive care and benefits.

It is a good bill. It is a bipartisan bill. As we head to Veterans Day, I want to make it clear that I am going to do everything I can to make this bill law soon.

Given the fact that we will all be home this weekend, I also want to take a few minutes to discuss another bipartisan piece of legislation that is important to the welfare of our veterans and a proposal that recently became law.

A few years ago, I learned that wounded members of the National Guard and Reserve were losing out on benefits under the GI Bill for time they spent in rehabilitation and recovery. These are men and women who put their lives on hold to serve our country abroad, and when they suffered injuries in the line of duty, their time spent recovering didn't count toward GI Bill benefits, even though it did for Active-Duty servicemembers in the same situation.

I think it is an understatement to say that is certainly a real head-scratcher, to not stand up for our Guard and Reserve to make sure they

are not losing out on benefits under the GI Bill for the time they spend in recovery and rehab. In effect, the Federal law was adding insult to injury by robbing wounded guardsmen and reservists of benefits they earned and should have been receiving all along. Estimates show that more than 20,000 servicemembers across our country were affected.

I approached our friend and colleague from Arkansas, Senator BOOZMAN, and he graciously agreed to team up with me. Senator BOOZMAN made it clear that a fellow from Arkansas and a fellow from Oregon were going to team up, leave the politics behind, and fix an injustice. We brought together a bipartisan group. We worked with the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and we were able to get the bill across the finish line. As of now, wounded guardsmen and reservists will get the education benefits they have rightly earned.

Especially today, when people are asking about the divisiveness and polarization that now consumes so much of the political debate, I wanted Senators to know that I really appreciate Senator BOOZMAN always trying to be constructive and a problem-solver. And this is one problem that is getting solved.

The law will apply retroactively, meaning that eligible veterans who already lost out will be made whole. Because it is so counterintuitive for servicemembers to lose benefits for being wounded—just think about that, servicemembers losing benefits for being wounded—many of our veterans haven't learned they were missing out. They never knew they were missing out. That is why I am very pleased, as I know Senator BOOZMAN is, that our law applies retroactively to all service after the 9/11 attacks.

I think it is true that success has a thousand parents, and if I thanked everybody on both sides of the aisle for all the work that went into this important bill, we would be here until suppertime tonight. But I do especially want to thank our colleagues, Senators MARKEY and MCCAIN. They lent important support along the way, as did Chairman JOHNNY ISAKSON and Ranking Member JON TESTER. Representative MARK TAKANO of California has also been an exceptional advocate in the other body.

I also wish to give a special thank-you to MAJ Steve Warren, a Department of Defense fellow in my office at the dawn of the process. He is considered a real rock star in terms of working for veterans. He did so much to bring this injustice to light and then worked diligently toward a solution. I think it is the judgment of everybody involved that without Steve's inspiration and perspiration, it would have been hard to see this injustice fixed and our even being here today, as we head to Veterans Day, to talk about it.

I close by way of saying that in this time of partisan rancor and the back-

and-forth that consumes so much of the political debate in Washington, I think what we have shown with this piece of legislation and its importance is that our veterans continue to be a unifying force. This good will comes from a deep respect for the All-Volunteer Force and for the sacrifices made by military families. It also stems from an appreciation for the role our veterans play in so many communities. In Oregon, our vets are small business owners, coders, mill workers, and educators. They help students at the Youth Challenge Program in Bend, and they help us fight fires. And suffice it to say, this year those fires were big, they were long, they were brutal, and we saw fires nobody could have even believed could happen, such as the one that jumped the Columbia River.

It doesn't mean that Congress, even with this legislation, always gets it right with respect to veterans. There is a whole lot more to be done, particularly ensuring timely access to top-quality healthcare through the VA or outside of it and ensuring that guardsmen and reservists get treated fairly and equitably.

I want to say this again on the eve of our taking time out specifically to honor veterans—although in our State, we believe that every day is really Veterans Day—I want to renew my pledge to the people of Oregon that I and my staff will keep working until our vets receive the care and treatment they have earned. We hope the success of our GI Bill Fairness Act demonstrates what can be done when the Congress sets aside all this business of trying to point score on partisanship and puts veterans first.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor to do what the Trump administration has failed to do; that is, to stand up for working families and fight for an economy that actually works for all, not just for the richest among us.

On the campaign trail, President Trump made promise after promise to workers. He promised to put them first and bring back good-paying jobs to their communities. Yet, since day one of his Presidency, we have seen him do just the opposite. His administration has rolled back protections for workers and families and prioritized corporate profits over working families' financial security.

He has put forth nominee after nominee who puts industry interests above the needs of families, like William Wehrum, President Trump's nominee to lead the EPA's Office of Air and Radiation. Mr. Wehrum is someone who

has worked to undermine the core mission of the office he would oversee. He is a nominee who has demonstrated a willingness to side with protecting Big Business instead of protecting our Nation's most valuable resources and whose independence is truly in question.

Unfortunately, when looking at President Trump's record as a businessman, these decisions do not come as a surprise. President Trump spent decades as a real estate developer, cheating workers and contractors out of their hard-earned pay, and he refused to allow his own hotel workers to join together and advocate for safer working conditions and better wages.

President Trump's vision of our economy is one in which workers bear the burden, and the people who live in gilded towers get the benefit. The contrast with Democrats could not be clearer. Last week, Democrats rolled out an ambitious agenda to reform our labor laws to, once again, empower workers to join together, make their voices heard, and fight for better wages and benefits.

Currently, it is extremely difficult for workers to seek justice when corporations violate their rights, and if we want to rebuild the middle class, we have to change that because workers having the right to organize and join unions helped to build the middle class we have today. For many workers in the 20th century, good union jobs helped them to support their families and climb the economic ladder, but over the past few decades, our economy has worked in favor of corporations and those at the top. As corporate management and special interests have undermined workers in their right to collectively bargain, we have seen, of course, a decline in unions and union membership across the country. This has allowed President Trump and billionaires like him to take advantage of their workers, and it has given workers little recourse in standing up and fighting for better working conditions.

The preamble of the National Labor Relations Act clearly states that it is the policy of the United States to encourage collective bargaining to give workers a voice, allowing them to speak up for fair wages and safe working conditions, and it is the responsibility of the NLRB to ensure that workers' rights are protected so they are not taken advantage of. The NLRB gives workers the opportunity to file charges against corporations when they are illegally fired or retaliated against for exercising their rights, and because President Trump's own businesses have had complaints filed against them numerous times, it is so critical now that the Board is independent and committed to that core mission.

Unfortunately, I have serious concerns about Mr. Robb's commitment to that core mission and to supporting workers' rights so more families, not fewer, have financial security. Mr.

Robb has spent most of his career as a corporate lawyer, representing Big Business and seeking to limit the rights that workers are guaranteed under the National Labor Relations Act—the very law he is now asking to be in charge of and enforce. He has defended companies against unfair labor allegations, age and discrimination charges, and unfair wage and hour claims. If he is confirmed, Mr. Robb will have the sole decision-making power as to which cases will be brought before the NLRB.

Given his long history of defending corporations, I don't believe workers can trust him to act with their best interests at heart or to stand up to President Trump and his vision of an economy that works for those at the top but that undercuts workers' wages, safety, and rights.

I will be voting no on Mr. Robb's nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. I know every single one of my colleagues has spoken to working families in his State who feel left behind today—families who work full time and who are saving what they can. They are struggling to make ends meet. It is time that we stop prioritizing corporate profits and start focusing on those workers and our middle class. We can only strengthen our economy if we give workers a voice in it.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TEXAS CHURCH MASS SHOOTING

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as the world now knows, there was a tragic shooting in Sutherland Springs, TX, last Sunday, which took the lives of 26 innocent people and injured 20 more. On Monday evening there was a prayer vigil for those victims. The community gathered to pray and to pay their respects to the deceased.

There are two people in particular who were in attendance, whom I want to highlight: Stephen Willeford and Johnnie Langendorff. I mentioned them yesterday, and perhaps you have seen them on the news, but I have been thinking a lot about them lately. In addition to the tragedy, this was really one of the things that gives you a little hope amidst the terrible circumstances. Stephen, of course, is the man who responded to the shooter's rampage by grabbing his rifle and running toward the First Baptist Church. Johnnie drove the truck that chased the gunman down at high speed. In typical Texas fashion, these two gentlemen don't consider themselves to be heroes, but I consider them to be heroes. They said that they were just doing what needed to be done. Johnnie

said it was an "act now, ask questions later" kind of deal.

I think we in Washington should take more of our cues from people like Johnnie and Stephen. We should show courage, track down anything that is not right, and do our very best to fix it. In particular, Stephen Willeford—maybe you have to be a Texan or an Alaskan to really appreciate what he did. From what I have read, he was an NRA-certified shooting instructor. He apparently heard the shooting at the church, grabbed his gun and went there and, basically, ended up stopping the shooter from killing more people.

The shooter apparently had accumulated enough ammunition to do a lot more damage than he did, but, thanks to the intervention of this concerned citizen, this person who was willing to put himself in harm's way actually shot the shooter and discouraged him from doing more. But for his actions, a lot more people would have died on that terrible, terrible Sunday.

The police can't be everywhere all of the time. That is one reason why, in my State and around the country, we believe that citizens ought to be able to defend themselves under appropriate circumstances.

We now know that the gunman was court-martialed by the Air Force and convicted of serious domestic abuse. Under current Federal law, this should have prohibited him from ever purchasing a firearm. The fact that it didn't means that we need to figure out why Federal law wasn't followed and make darn sure that the relevant information is always uploaded into the background check databases.

There were multiple errors—human and systematic errors—that should have prevented this shooter from ever buying a firearm. He unlawfully purchased four firearms that he wasn't permitted to purchase. Federal background checks did not turn up his Air Force conviction for domestic violence, a felony, for fracturing the skull of his infant stepson. These convictions were not uploaded on the NICS Federal database.

I plan to introduce legislation—and I have been talking to a number of colleagues on both sides of the aisle who are interested in providing a solution to this problem, but we are going to introduce legislation to ensure that all Federal departments and agencies, including the Department of Defense, upload the required conviction records. My legislation will also encourage to the greatest extent possible under the Constitution that State and local governments do the same.

We all remember the terrible shooting that occurred at Virginia Tech a few years ago by a person who had already been adjudicated to be mentally ill by the State, but because the State did not upload that information into the Federal database when he went to buy a firearm, there was no hit, no disqualifier that appeared that would have prevented him from buying that

firearm in the first place. We need to make sure those systems work every time.

What Sutherland Springs has exposed is that the Federal Government is failing to comply with reporting requirements. This is unacceptable, and it must change.

Yesterday, Gen. David Goldfein, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, came by my office, and I am grateful to him for that. I told him that it must have been one of his worst days when he found out that the Air Force had failed to notify the Federal authorities of the information that would have disqualified this individual from buying a firearm. He appropriately expressed grave concern over the fact that the gunman's convictions were not sent to the NICS database. He pledged to get to the root of the problem, and I believe him.

It is worth noting that we have tried to address similar problems before, and we can do it again. In 2015, I introduced a bill called the Mental Health and Safe Communities Act, which addressed a related issue, and that was the failure of State and local authorities to upload valuable mental health records into this same NICS database.

I think there is a bipartisan willingness in this Chamber to work on problems inherent in the sharing of these records, and I hope my colleagues will join with me in supporting this new legislation once it is introduced. We are shooting for the first part of next week. We owe it to the men and women and the families of Sutherland Springs to make sure that our laws are enforced and that individuals like this shooter with a history of violence do not gain illegal access to firearms.

#### TAX REFORM

Mr. President, I want to address the work that the House Ways and Means Committee is currently engaged in and what we will be doing in the U.S. Senate to reform our overly complex, burdensome, and self-destructive tax system. I think there is a lot of momentum gathering each day.

Yesterday, Senator MCCONNELL, the majority leader, commented on our once-in-a-generation opportunity to overhaul our Tax Code. To accomplish this goal, both the House and the Senate are moving forward on different proposals.

This week, the House Ways and Means Committee completed its first 2 days of discussing the House bill unveiled last week called the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. At the same time, the Senate Finance Committee is continuing its work too. Chairman HATCH will continue to guide the committee through an open process, and members will have the chance to engage in productive discussions and debate. That will start once the chairman's mark or the base bill is released, hopefully by later this week. Perhaps as early as next week, we will begin the process in the Senate Finance Committee of marking up that bill, with Senators offering amendments and voting on it.

Once both Houses of Congress have completed their work, my hope is that we can get this bill on the President's desk by Christmas.

Some of our colleagues across the aisle, instead of contributing to the solution to this overly complex and self-destructive Tax Code, have been lobbing insults from their partisan bunkers, even though many of them have endorsed many aspects of the plans in years past. For example, early on, interestingly, there was criticism of our desire to make our global tax system more competitive so that more businesses will move their manufacturing facilities back to the United States and so that we can stamp more of their products "Made in America," creating more jobs here. It is ironic because they were criticizing us for giving tax relief to businesses when people like President Barack Obama, back in 2011, had endorsed the very same concept, not to mention the ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator WYDEN, and Senator SCHUMER. All of them have endorsed similar proposals, yet they were quick to criticize us for doing exactly the same things that they themselves had previously endorsed. Unfortunately, our Democratic friends are quick to criticize our plans not just because they disagree with them on the merits but simply because it is our proposal and they are not interested in working with us across party lines.

This is really a shame and a lost opportunity. People are crying out for Democrats and Republicans to work together in the best interests of the country. Unfortunately, our Democratic friends are simply ignoring the urgency of the situation—the stagnation of American workers' wages and couples finding it harder to start families or, once they do, pay for a college education. As my friend the junior Senator from Florida, Senator RUBIO, wrote a few days ago in the *New York Times*, it is more than time to reconcile "our social contract to the realities that working families face."

The Tax Code has not been comprehensively overhauled since 1986. Now that some of us are trying to, the swamp is fighting back. It is important that we win this fight against the swamp—the special interest groups that try to come in and protect various special-interest tax provisions that make our code unnecessarily complicated, forcing us to look for additional revenue from other sources because they want to protect theirs at the expense of the rest of the country.

But the do-nothing approach of the recent past will not work. We can't let them stop us because hard-working families are waiting. They are waiting on us to quit stuffing our own pockets and start putting money back into theirs.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, at 3:45 p.m. today there be 30 minutes of postcloture time remaining on the Robb nomination, equally divided between the leaders or their designees; that following the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate vote on the confirmation of the Robb nomination; and that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; finally, that there be 2 minutes of debate equally divided prior to the cloture vote on the Wehrum nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, Donald Trump has consistently made promises to the American people that he refuses to keep. He says one thing and does the exact opposite. His empty promises have already hurt millions of people across the country, from our seniors who depend on Medicare and Medicaid, to the LGBTQ community he promised to protect and Dreamers living in fear of deportation.

Now, with the nomination of Peter Robb to serve as the General Counsel at the National Labor Relations Board, or NLRB, Donald Trump has broken yet another promise—this time, to fight for and protect American workers. As an independent agency, the NLRB has an important mission to enforce our Nation's labor laws, protect American workers, and safeguard their right to organize collectively.

The NLRB's mission is not to ignore our Nation's labor laws, to go after American workers, or to weaken their right to organize. Yet Peter Robb's career has been dedicated to doing all the things that NLRB is not about.

Joining the anti-union, anti-worker forces, President Trump has consistently nominated people to the NLRB who are best positioned to destroy and undermine the core functions of the agency itself. Earlier this year, President Trump forced through two management-side lawyers to create an anti-worker majority on the NLRB.

Today the Senate is debating the nomination of someone who has spent his entire legal career fighting to screw over the very workers the NLRB is supposed to protect. If confirmed as General Counsel, Mr. Robb will be responsible for supervising nearly 1,500 agents investigating and prosecuting unfair labor practice cases and overseeing elections where workers decide whether or not to unionize. This is a position

of great consequence for millions of workers across our country, and they deserve someone much better than Peter Robb.

Mr. Robb has spent his career defending management and employers from workers fighting to form a union, unionized workers on strike, and workers who brought forward discrimination and disability claims. You don't have to take my word for it. Mr. Robb's biography on his own law firm's website tells the story clearly:

[His] extensive experience includes advising on mergers/acquisitions, plant closings, labor contract negotiations (both large and small), managing lockouts and strikes, securing labor injunctions, discrimination issues and disability claims.

His litigation includes defending employers from unfair labor practice charges, age and sex discrimination charges, class action age claims, and wage/hour claims as well as bringing suits against labor organizations. With such vast experience and a no-nonsense approach, Peter's clients look to him for sharp advice, rigorous representation and powerful litigation.

That is a description on his own law firm's website.

Mr. Robb cut his teeth busting unions and retaliating against workers as lead counsel at the NLRB in the early 1980s when President Reagan decertified the air traffic controllers union, fired 11,000 air traffic controllers, and barred them from Federal service. More recently, he represented Dominion Energy's successful attempt to defeat a union organizing campaign at a power station in Connecticut.

Management and corporations have a right to hire lawyers like Mr. Robb who will vigorously represent their interests, but Mr. Robb is certainly not the right person to lead an agency whose mission is to protect workers' rights, not to go after those rights tooth and nail. Mr. Robb's record clearly demonstrates that he will side with powerful corporations and special interests over workers who lack the resources to defend themselves.

Unions built the middle class in Hawaii and across our country. Instead of confirming another management protector at the NLRB, we should be working together to protect workers and make it fairer for them to form and to join a union, which is their right.

I urge my colleagues to join me in opposing this nominee.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

#### AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise to talk about the affordable housing crisis that is gripping our Nation. When I say "crisis," I mean I know that people here are on the precipice of talking about what we are going to do in response to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma and Maria, and I would like to say, the housing crisis that will exist in the aftermath of those hurricanes is real, but there are also even greater implications from the housing crisis

that exist today without those hurricanes, and it is only going to continue to grow and get worse until we deal with it.

This past February, more than 2,000 families packed into the New Holly Gathering Hall in South Seattle. Each family was hoping to hear its name called. It wasn't a contest. It wasn't a game. It wasn't the lottery. It was a lottery to see if families could get affordable homes.

The Mercy Othello Plaza would soon open 108 affordable housing units. That is hardly a match for the more than 2,000 families who were interested in trying to get into one of those affordable units. Based on the numbers alone, their chance of getting an affordable home was lower than an applicant's chance of getting into Harvard.

Ninety-five percent of the families attending that night left disappointed, continuing to search for affordable housing. This is just one story of how the affordable housing crisis is gripping our Nation. I am sure every one of my colleagues in the Senate could talk about a story they have heard in their State because this crisis impacts every State. It impacts every community, both urban and rural alike.

As I have traveled across the State of Washington, I have seen some of the most hard-hit areas for affordable housing. I even have veterans returning home not being able to find affordable housing. I have seen an aging population living longer and also not having the resources when looking for affordable housing. I have seen young workers who want to be close to where their employment is and yet having to drive so far away because that is the only place they could find affordable housing. We have seen homelessness in numbers that harken back to previous days when we had a true recession.

The most damning part of the housing crisis is, we know how to solve it. We just need the courage to act.

For decades, the housing growth was the most stimulative part of our economy. Throughout the 1980s, housing was 18 percent of GDP. Today that number has dropped to just 15 percent. When people discuss tax reform and GDP growth, housing is still one of the ways that economists will tell us that we can grow GDP.

In the sixties, seventies, and eighties, if somebody asked, How do we stimulate our economy, usually a cheer would go up for housing, but since the economic downturn, we haven't heard that cheer. In fact, it is almost as if we have forgotten how stimulative housing is to our economy.

The total number of houses built between 2007 and 2016 total just 8.9 million units, which is far below the 15 million-plus average for every 10-year period through the seventies and nineties. We are off the pace of what it takes to provide affordable housing. As a result, the vacancy rates and inventories of homes for sale have also fallen. The national vacancy rate—which

is the number of homes for sale—has receded to the 2000 level, erasing all the runup we saw in the housing boom. Moreover, homeownership in the United States is now at its lowest rate since the 1960s.

Twenty million American families, including 11 million renters, are now spending more than half of their income on housing. That means less money for other essentials like food and healthcare and gas.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition tells us that 7.4 million more available affordable homes are needed because we have seen an increase of 60 percent since the year 2000 in the need for affordable housing.

So the United States has become a rent-burdened economy. If we don't address this crisis, the problem is only going to get worse. In fact, one study found that if we don't address this crisis, we are going to see another 25-percent increase in the number of Americans spending more than half of their income in rent.

I know my colleagues on the other side of the aisle in the House of Representatives are talking about what they want to do in tax reform. I would say they should look at this data as it relates to where we are with homeownership and housing and things that would eliminate the private activity bonds—one of the key drivers of affordable housing production. It would be a big mistake if they got rid of that. Obviously, there are units of affordable housing that are being planned and built right now. In fact, one estimate is that over 1,000,000 units wouldn't be completed just because of the House provision.

Obviously, limiting the mortgage interest deduction for new homeowners could potentially increase taxes on homeowners and thereby limit the number of people who could afford a home. Almost one-third of taxpayers nationally claim the property tax deductions. They could also see an impact to that. I hope our House colleagues and our Senate colleagues will see, in light of the housing crisis, what a terrible idea those things are.

How did we get to this crisis as it exists now? Part of the issue was demand. For starters, the 2007 housing crash pushed millions of families into the rental market and reduced wages on working families. The demand for rental housing skyrocketed.

Over 7 million Americans lost their homes to foreclosure, and they demanded more affordable places to live. Today the homeownership rate is the lowest in our Nation since the 1960s. The last 10 years have seen the largest gain of renters on record. The demand for rental housing shows no sign of slowing down.

Millennials, like many of the young people we see who want to be close to jobs in our burgeoning economy, are forced to rent instead of own. They are seeing that challenged, in big numbers, by the fact that there is not enough supply.

At the same time demand was going up from returning veterans, from aging seniors, from workplace needs, from many more people needing affordable housing after being pushed out of the homeownership market—at the same time demand was going up, supply failed to keep pace. Affordable housing stock is being, and was being, converted to market rate-based units. That means they got taken out of the affordability framework.

A new report found that the number of apartments being deemed affordable for low-income families dropped 60 percent over the last 6 years.

With all this pressure and demand of people falling out of home and back into the market and pushing things down, we saw so many units that were affordable units get transferred over to market-based rates and thereby losing supply.

The new production of affordable housing has not filled the gap, and production of affordable housing is at its lowest 10-year production rate on record since 1974. It, too, has played a role in this problem.

The combination of increased demand and lack of production has caused the explosion in our affordable housing crisis. The number of Americans facing extreme unaffordability—that means they are paying more than 50 percent—has gone from 7 million Americans to 11.2 million Americans. That is a 60-percent increase in the number of people in the United States who are in this area of extremely unaffordable rates for housing.

While I know we are going to discuss natural disasters and helping communities recover—everywhere from the families who have been impacted in Florida, in Texas, and various places—we also have to look at the issue of affordable housing everywhere from Seattle and Portland and San Francisco to all the way across the country, to Philadelphia and Miami and many other places.

In the aftermath of Katrina, Congress passed an expansion of the low-income housing tax credit, and it built 28,000 affordable units on the gulf. I know my colleagues will want to do something similar for Texas and the Gulf States to make sure we are doing something, but we need to understand that at the time of Katrina, there was a need due to more than 275,000 homes destroyed by that hurricane. Building 28,000 units was barely a blip.

The low-income housing tax credit helped rebuild some units, but it came nowhere close to solving the housing crisis in New Orleans. Market rates in New Orleans are 35 percent higher after the storm, and 37 percent of households are paying more than half of their income in housing. Now, 12 years later, another disaster has hit, and we are going to try to address this crisis, but the housing burden for extremely low-income families in Texas and the major metro areas of Texas is among some of the worst in the Nation. That was be-

fore the crisis. Before the actual impact of hurricanes, Texas was already at a crisis point.

Texas has only 29 affordable units for every 100 low-income households looking for those options. Houston is the third worst in the country for housing availability for extremely low-income people. Now families from Florida to Puerto Rico are going to also be finding a very difficult situation.

Expanding the tax credit could help, but we have to do more than just expand the tax credit for those disaster States. We need a very big systematic investment in affordable housing all across the United States, and expanding the low-income housing tax credit is one way to do that. The good news is, we have good bipartisan support for the low-income housing tax credit enacted in 1986. It helped build 3 million rental units across this country over the last 30 years. If you want to make a dent in this crisis, both in response to the hurricanes and the crisis that already existed, we need to begin filling that gap by increasing the credit.

That is why I joined Senator HATCH in introducing the Affordable Housing Tax Credit Improvement Act, something that would help us build hundreds of thousands of new units in the next 10 years. I am glad Senators WYDEN, PORTMAN, SULLIVAN, MERKLEY, SCOTT, BENNET, COLLINS, KAINE, HELLER, LEAHY, SHAHEEN, MURRAY, SCHUMER, MURKOWSKI, YOUNG, GRAHAM, SCHATZ, BOOKER, HASSAN, ISAKSON, and SANDERS are all supporters.

We have good, bipartisan support from people who understand that this crisis is real and that it is only going to grow. But we also know that the additional tax credit would create almost 450,000 new jobs over the next 10 years. That is because housing is stimulative to the economy. Construction alone supports over 2 million jobs. And it helps by making sure that the economic impact to GDP is realized now through this investment.

It also helps us save money as an economy and a country by putting a roof over people's heads. One of the reasons I was so excited to work with Senator HATCH on this was because in his home State of Utah, they made such great progress in dealing with their homeless veteran population. The community decided that by putting a roof over someone's head, they actually helped lower overall costs. One study found that placing people in affordable housing lowered Federal Medicaid expenditures by an average of 12 percent, and a University of Pennsylvania study found that taxpayers could save \$16,000 per homeless person who was placed in affordable housing.

So we need to act. We need to realize that housing provides an investment in job creation and has historically contributed between 2 to 4 percent of GDP growth since the 1980s; that it is an underpinning of our economy; and that we need to make sure that our Tax Code works and make sure that people

are purchasing homes as well as finding affordable housing.

As our colleagues deal with the end-of-the-year policy issues and deal with our response to these storms, I hope we will realize that this underlying crisis also needs attention. We have worked on a bipartisan basis in the past to address it, and we can work on a bipartisan basis in the future to both stimulate our economy and solve these problems.

Ninety percent of the affordable housing units being built in the country use these tax credits, so it is only by extending the tax credits, putting a roof over people's heads, that we are going to be able to deal with this crisis. The good news is, it helps us save money and it helps us with GDP growth.

I thank the Chair.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORAN). The Senator from Maryland.

NOMINATION OF WILLIAM WEHRUM

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, later today we will start the process of voting on the confirmation of William Wehrum for Assistant Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Air and Radiation. I take this time to urge my colleagues to reject this nominee and vote against his confirmation.

The EPA Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation supervises national programs and policies for regulating air pollution and radiation exposure. Notably, this office administers the Clean Air Act.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, I once again find myself using my voice to say that science and public health, not partisan politics, should drive the confirmation process.

If confirmed, Mr. Wehrum is expected to play a leading role in dismantling climate change regulations. Since the Supreme Court decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA* in 2007 ruled that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are dangerous air pollutants, OAR is the office that accepted the endangerment finding and developed the Clean Power Plan to address carbon pollution.

Given the Trump administration's own admission—or lack of suppression—in the latest update to the National Climate Assessment “that it is extremely likely that human activities, especially emissions of greenhouse gases, are the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century,” it should be common sense to nominate and confirm Administrators who care about our environment and our future, including acting on climate change. It is inexcusable to confirm those who disagree with that. I am not convinced that Mr. Wehrum will act on carbon pollution or any other air pollutant.

It would take an extraordinarily independent Assistant Administrator to resist the current course at the EPA under EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt.

We know that we have a challenge at the top. We need as the person to head this Agency a person of integrity who will stand up for what science tells us we need to do in protecting air quality. I would argue that Mr. Wehrum is not that person.

Let me go over some of the challenges we face.

For example, in January of 2017, the EPA issued itself a 6-month extension to respond to Maryland's Good Neighbor petition. The petition alleges that 36 powerplants in five neighboring States are preventing Maryland from meeting its own obligations under the Clean Air Act. That deadline expired with no EPA action on the petition.

On September 27, 2017, Maryland filed suit against the EPA.

On October 5 of this year, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation filed a similar lawsuit because pollution from powerplants is a source of nitrogen pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

On October 27, 2017, the EPA denied a separate Maryland petition asking the EPA to add nine States to the Ozone Transport Region, alleging that these States contribute to the violation of the 2008 ozone national ambient air quality standards.

In its response to the petition, the EPA determined that expanding the Ozone Transport Region is "not appropriate at this time" because existing rules will achieve reductions in emissions. The EPA's response states that "better-targeted approaches, such as those under the Clean Air Act's good neighbor provision, would be more effective in addressing the 2008 ozone targets."

The EPA's reasoning to deny the Ozone Transport Region petition—that existing rules will adequately address transported pollution—is predicated on the sincere implementation of those rules. In fact, Maryland did utilize—we did utilize—a "better targeted approach." Maryland filed a Good Neighbor petition last November that was ignored for 1 year, prompting the lawsuit against the EPA.

Based on his professional history and testimony, I do not have reason to believe that Mr. Wehrum will ensure that existing rules will adequately address air pollution. While he worked at the EPA during the George W. Bush administration, Mr. Wehrum attempted to direct the Agency's air requirements to favor markets, earning praise from industry groups he would later represent in private practice. How can we ask Mr. Wehrum to objectively administer the Clean Air Act after a career spent on one side?

Mr. Wehrum has 20-plus years working for the industry as a lobbyist. He has a record of ignoring science in the recommendations that he made. There are examples of where he absolutely disagreed with expert groups—just to give one example, the Academy of American Pediatricians' assessment on mercury and air toxins submissions. Mr. Wehrum took issue and disagreed with their findings.

He was seen as an unacceptable choice in 2007 when he was nominated to lead the same Agency by President Bush, and his nomination was withdrawn over Democratic opposition. So this is not the first time we have had a chance to deal with Mr. Wehrum for this position. In the interim, he has only continued his work to advance industry by advocating for weakening the Clean Air Act.

I will continue to stand up for the rights of Marylanders and all Americans to air that is safe to breathe and a climate that is livable, and all of us can help in that regard by rejecting this nominee.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TAX REFORM

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, 1 year ago, the American people went to the polls. The American people demanded a change. They demanded a change from 8 years of too little economic growth and too much government control and regulations. The effect was immediate, and the effect was incredible.

In the past year, we have gotten a lot of very good news about the American economy. Right after the election, businesses became much more optimistic about the direction of our country and they started hiring. Last Friday, we learned that in the United States we have created more than 2 million jobs since election day 2016. Someone said to me: Well, you shouldn't count it from election day. You should count it from Inauguration Day. Certainly, in my home State of Wyoming, on election day there was a confidence, an optimism, a positive feeling that started just at the moment it was announced that Donald Trump had been elected President of the United States.

Right now we have the lowest rate of unemployment since the year 2002. We have seen the economy grow at more than 3 percent for the past 2 quarters. Consumer confidence just reached the highest level in almost 17 years. All of this is happening since President Trump was elected, and this is very good news for America.

We can't stop now. We have to do all we can to keep on this path toward a more prosperous country. Americans are optimistic because they know that President Trump is focused on easing the regulations that have held back our economy for the last 8 years. We know that government can create opportunity or crush opportunity based on a combination of regulations, mandates, and taxes. We are now in the

land of opportunity, eliminating the regulations and pulling back on taxes to helping our economy grow.

The President has signed legislation that we passed in this Congress repealing one after another of the Obama administration's rules, regulations, and restrictions. President Trump has issued Executive orders cutting back on excessive redtape. President Trump has appointed very good people to important jobs who are committed to reining in Washington's out-of-control bureaucracy. All of these things are important and critical to keeping our economy growing.

Another big part is what we are trying to do now in terms of cutting taxes for the American people. People want to keep more of their hard-earned money in their own pockets.

Here in the Senate we now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to cut taxes in a way that will actually help American families. We can help families directly by raising their incomes, and we can help them indirectly by growing the economy. Here is how we can do both, because that needs to be our goal.

The first thing we can do is to give people a raise by doubling the standard deduction. If we raise the deduction, people keep more of their hard-earned money, and it makes taxes simpler. Right now, the standard deduction for a married couple is \$12,000. Two-thirds of Americans take this deduction. If we roughly double it, people will not pay any Federal income tax at all on the first \$24,000 they earn. That is a big cut. It means that a lot more people will decide to take this deduction instead of having to go through the painstaking process of itemizing their deductions on their tax return. It saves them a lot of time, it saves them a lot of headaches, and it saves them the cost of accountants and lawyers who have to help figure out the very complicated tax system in this country. Millions of families will be better off just from this one tax cut alone.

A second thing Republicans are looking to do is to reduce the tax rate for small businesses, the people who are creating jobs all across the country. If someone owns a small business in my home State of Wyoming, she probably ends up paying the taxes on her personal tax return rather than on a separate business tax return. If we cut her tax bill, that is money she can then use to give her workers a raise, to hire more people, and to create more jobs in our community. She can put money back into the business to help grow the economy as well.

When you leave more money in people's pockets, they get to decide how to use that money—what they decide to spend, what they decide to save, and what they decide to invest. People are much better watching their own money than the government ever was, giving people value for that money.

So we want to make sure that tax reform includes a break for small businesses. Around here, they use the

words “tax reform.” To me, it is about tax reduction, tax relief, and tax cuts. Republicans also want to bring down the rates that Washington charges other businesses. If we can cut the rate businesses pay from 35 percent down to 20 percent, that could be an enormous boost to the economy. Economists who look at this say it is like giving the average American family a \$4,000 a year raise. That is how much the average household’s income would go up, because workers actually bear most of the burden of taxes that businesses pay.

Now, Democrats actually think the money belongs to Washington. It doesn’t. It belongs to the people at home who earn it. Democrats often think that if you give Americans even a single dollar in tax cuts, you are taking away Washington’s money. It is not Washington’s money. The money belongs to the people at home.

We know the exact opposite of what the Democrats believe to be true. Republicans know that giving Americans a tax cut is the same as giving them a raise. Every dollar a family doesn’t have to send to Washington in taxes is a dollar they can use for something better. It is a dollar they can use for food, for shelter, for kids, for education, for things that matter to their family. It is another dollar a small business can use to pay its workers more or reinvest in the business to help grow the economy in that community. Tax cuts mean that people decide how to spend their own money; Washington doesn’t decide. Families know how to use money much better than Washington ever will.

As we debate these issues and ideas with regard to tax relief, we have an exciting opportunity to give the American people a raise and to give the American economy a boost. This is something a lot of people have been working on for a long time in the Senate. Over the past 6 years, the Finance Committee has held 70 hearings on how to make our Tax Code better for all Americans.

Republicans are working, and we are listening to make sure that we get the tax reform right that the American people and families need. When it comes to tax cuts, I believe the more the better. The more people who get a tax cut, the better. The more we grow our economy, the better. It is our job. It is about paychecks. It is about jobs. It is about prosperity. It is about a strong and healthy economy for America. That is what we as Republicans are committed to. We cannot let this opportunity pass.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, whether one is a progressive, a Democrat, a conservative, a Republican, or somewhere in between, there is a deep understanding in this country that we are living in a rigged economy, and people are increasingly angry and frustrated

about the growing inequality and unfairness they see all about them.

It is hard to believe, but in the United States of America today, the top one-tenth of 1 percent now owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent—one-tenth of 1 percent, bottom 90 percent. A study came out fairly recently indicating that in the United States of America today, the three wealthiest people in our country—Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Warren Buffett—now own more wealth than the bottom half of the American people. Three people own more wealth than the bottom half of the American people.

Meanwhile, while the very, very rich get richer, some 40 million Americans are living in poverty. These are people who are struggling today to figure out how they put food on the table for their kids, how they put gas in the car in order to go to work, how they pay their electric bills, how they deal with childcare. There are 40 million people living in poverty. The middle class is disappearing. People are working two or three jobs. For the first time in the modern history of this country, young people may well have a standard of living lower than their parents’.

On top of all of that, we remain the only major country on Earth that doesn’t guarantee healthcare to all of our people. Twenty-eight million people today have no health insurance. Many more are underinsured. And if our Republican colleagues get their way, they are going to throw another 20 or 30 million people off of their health insurance.

It is not only the reality of grotesque levels of inequality that is making the American people despondent and angry; it is the reality that the people on top, with their wealth and power, can access lawyers and accountants who are able to manipulate the system to benefit themselves at the expense of everyone else. That is the essence of what a rigged economy is about and what I want to say a few words about today.

In my view, one of the great crises facing our world—and we are in a world of many crises—is the rapid movement toward international oligarchy in which a handful of billionaires own and control not just a significant part of the American economy but a significant part of the world economy. Needless to say, this is an issue that does not get a whole lot of discussion because, in general, the more important the issues are, the less discussion they get within the corporate media or within the political world that we live in here in the Congress.

Let me reiterate. One of the great crises that we face is that a handful of billionaires are moving this entire planet toward an oligarchic society in which the people on top not only have incredible wealth but incredible political power as well.

This last Sunday, a group of investigative journalists released over 13

million files known as the Paradise Papers exposing just how horrific this situation has become. These papers show how a handful of oligarchs in the United States and throughout the world get richer by hiding their wealth and their profits offshore to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. The list of individuals implicated in the Paradise Papers include billionaires such as the Koch brothers, Sheldon Adelson, Carl Icahn, and Robert Mercer. It includes large financial institutions such as Wells Fargo, Citigroup, and Bank of America. It includes large multinational corporations such as Apple, Nike, and ExxonMobil. It includes members of the Trump administration, such as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, chief economic adviser Gary Cohn, and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin.

Let’s be clear. Offshore tax evasion is a major problem not just for the United States but for governments throughout the world. This is really quite unbelievable. In the year 2012, the Tax Justice Network estimated that at least \$21 trillion—\$21 trillion, a number almost beyond comprehension—is being stashed in offshore tax havens around the world. Imagine that. There is \$21 trillion flowing into tax havens in the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, Luxembourg—all these places around the world where the billionaire class and large corporations are stashing their money not only to avoid taxes in the United States but to avoid taxes in Great Britain, France, Germany, et cetera.

There is a funny thing about these guys. All of these billionaires love veterans, and they love the military. They want to see us rebuild the infrastructure, and they want to see our kids get a good education. But you know what, they don’t want to pay taxes to make that happen. They want ordinary people to pay the taxes. Republicans here want to increase military spending by \$50, \$60 billion. It is not the billionaires who are going to pay the taxes on that—they have their money in the Cayman Islands. It is the working class, the middle class, upper middle class who will pay, not the billionaires. They love America—except when it comes to accepting their fair share to make sure that we continue to provide the services our men, women, and children need.

The situation has become so absurd—and this is really how crazy it is—that one five-story office building in the Cayman Islands is now the home of nearly 20,000 corporations. This particular building in the Cayman Islands is called the Ugland House. It is five stories. I know that you can squeeze people into a building—sometimes three or four people live in a room—but I think it is a little bit hard to understand how 20,000 corporations function in a five-story building. Of course the answer is that 20,000 corporations do not function in this five-story building.

It is all a fraud. It is simply a mailbox address for 20,000 corporations that are in this building in order to avoid paying their taxes. They are stashing their profits and their wealth in corporations that use this building as a mailing address.

I know we are busy talking about so-called tax reform here, but in the United States alone, offshore tax evasion costs our government about \$166 billion in lost revenue each and every year. That is a lot of money that could be used to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure—our roads, our bridges, our water systems. One trillion dollars—that is 8 or 9 years of that \$166 billion—could create up to 15 million good-paying jobs. That is money that could be used to provide universal pre-K for our children so that when kids get ready to go to school, they will be prepared to do the work there. But instead of cracking down on offshore tax schemes, President Trump and my Republican colleagues in Congress are working overtime to pass legislation that would make this absurd situation even worse.

At a time when corporations are making recordbreaking profits, my Republican colleagues want to slash taxes for companies that are shifting American jobs to China and American profits to the Cayman Islands. At a time of massive wealth and income inequality, President Trump and the Republicans in Congress want to cut taxes for billionaires by repealing the estate tax on families who inherit over \$5.5 million. I think the American people grasp the unfairness and the absurdity of the Republican tax proposal.

The top one-tenth of 1 percent own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. The very, very rich are getting richer while the middle class is shrinking, and the Republican response is to give massive tax breaks to the top two-tenths of 1 percent—two-tenths of 1 percent. These are families like the Walton family, the wealthiest family in America, who owns Walmart, who would get up to a \$50 billion tax break; and the Koch brothers, who have enough money to spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to elect rightwing candidates to Congress.

There are massive tax breaks for billionaires and at the same time, an effort to throw up to 30 million people off of the health insurance they have, massive cuts in education, in nutrition, and in the programs that working families desperately need.

Instead of providing even more tax breaks to very profitable corporations and to billionaires and President Trump's Cabinet, maybe—just maybe—it might be a good idea to close offshore tax loopholes and demand a fair, transparent, and progressive tax system.

I hope the American people are catching on—as I believe they are—to what a fraud the Republican tax proposal is. Today, one out of five major, profitable corporations already pays zero in Federal income tax. You can't

do much better than paying zero in Federal income tax and be a profitable corporation, but that is what is going on. Republicans want to make that even worse, and then they want millions of middle-class people, by the end of the decade, to be paying more in taxes. That is absurd, and I hope the American people stand up and demand that we do not go forward with that proposal.

#### HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, on another issue, I want to mention that there is a crisis in primary healthcare, and unless Congress acts immediately, that crisis is likely to become much worse. Millions of Americans are at risk of losing their access to healthcare because Congress has still not renewed funding for the community health center program, which expired on September 30.

Our Nation's community health centers provide affordable, high-quality healthcare to more than 27 million people. What community health centers do is not only provide high-quality primary healthcare but also dental care, mental health counseling, and low-cost prescription drugs. Community health centers not only save lives, they also end up saving money. What they do is keep people out of emergency rooms and keep people out of hospitals because people can now go to the doctor when they should. The savings are also, really, quite significant. Investing in community health centers keeps people healthier, keeps people alive, and saves taxpayers' money.

Not only do we have to renew funding for the Community Health Center Program, but we must also improve and expand the National Health Service Corps, one of the, really, very positive health programs that the Federal Government runs. What this program understands is that for a variety of reasons, including the fact that many young people leave medical school being \$300,000, \$400,000 in debt, it is very hard to get young doctors, dentists, nurses, and nurse practitioners to underserved areas in rural America or in urban America. What this program does is provide debt forgiveness and sometimes scholarships for young graduates of medical school or nursing school or dental school and says: If you are prepared to practice in an underserved area, we will forgive your loans. That is a big deal in attracting providers to areas in which we desperately need them.

The bad news is that, as every American knows, this Congress and this country are very politically divided. That is no great secret. The good news and the truth is that in terms of community health centers—Senator Ted Kennedy was one of the founders, who worked with Republicans—from the inception of the program, there has been a widespread understanding on both sides of the aisle that communities all over America in every State in our country are benefiting from community health centers whether they are in

rural areas or whether they are in urban areas or anywhere else in between.

What I am very happy to note is that there is excellent legislation—bipartisan legislation—here in the Senate, introduced by Senator ROY BLUNT and Senator DEBBIE STABENOW, that would reauthorize these successful programs for 5 years and provide modest increases in their funding. This program not only has the support of virtually, perhaps, every Democrat or every Member of the Democratic Caucus, but I think it has at least 9 or 10 Republican cosponsors. I believe, if that bill were to be brought to the floor of the Senate, it would pass with overwhelming support because every Senator here knows of the excellent work that is done by community health centers from one end of this country to the other.

I hope that this issue will get the attention it deserves. It should have been funded at the end of the fiscal year. It wasn't. I just talked to a physician in Burlington, VT, who works for a community health center. They are worried, and doctors and nurses all across this country are worried, as are patients, about the lack of reauthorization of this very important bill.

I hope that this bill will get moved very quickly along with the CHIP program. There is bipartisan support for it, and I hope that we can get it to the floor and get it passed as quickly as possible.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### VETERANS DAY

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, this coming week will mark Veterans Day. It is an important time for us to reflect on what veterans do for us and what their families do for us. The sacrifices of both those who serve and those who support those who serve are incredibly important.

We have half a million Missouri veterans, and one of the great privileges of this job is to get to represent them, their values, and the commitment to freedom in our country that they stand for.

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to welcome a group of southwest Missouri veterans who came to Washington with the Honor Flight program. I think the Presiding Officer also does this, but every time I get a chance, if there is an Honor Flight from our State, I try to get down there because it is a great time to see and to talk to and to thank those who have served us.

When the Honor Flights started 20 years ago or so, there were still some

World War I veterans coming, and then they were almost all World War II veterans. Today we see some World War II veterans, Korea veterans, and Vietnam veterans, all of whom serve in the great tradition of being willing to fight for the freedoms that we enjoy every day. I find it humbling and gratifying to know that those veterans get to come here and enjoy the day with each other. In many cases it is the first time they have ever been to the Capitol, the National World War II Memorial, Arlington, and the other places on the trip that now so many tens of thousands have taken.

Many of those veterans whom I saw the other day and whom I have seen through the history of the Honor Flight program were just teenagers when they answered the call to serve—basically, a little more than high school kids who knew that something needed to be done and they were able and willing to do it. They fought difficult battles and, in some cases, often under unbearable conditions. Some of them lost their closest friends in the military. Many of them lost comrades in arms. Some of them lost comrades right beside them. Some of them lost people who went out on another mission and never came back. Some of their families lost a servicemember who never became a veteran.

I was down in Perryville, MO, a little town between Cape Girardeau and St. Louis, on the Mississippi River. They are building an exact replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial—the Vietnam wall. We were able to present a flag to the group that raised the money and made the plan to replicate the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall to take it back and become part of the Vietnam memorial at Perryville.

Our veterans are an extraordinary group of men and women. They really stand for the best we stand for as a nation. It is important that with not just honor them on Veterans Day but honor them every day—every day that we live in this free and prosperous Nation that they helped defend.

Admittedly, it is hard not to take all of the freedoms that we enjoy for granted because generations of Americans have been willing to fight and die to protect those freedoms. Because of that, generations of Americans have benefitted from those freedoms, and it seems to us the way people should be able to live everywhere. Maybe too often we think it is the way people do live everywhere, but in many parts of the world, having the security to walk out the door every morning, to drop your kids off at school, to go to work and earn a living, to worship as you please, and to build a better life is not available to people in other countries the way it is here. That is the debt of gratitude we owe to our veterans.

This year, one of the areas of great legislative success has been in the work for veterans. Chairman ISAKSON of Georgia is going to follow me on the floor in just a few minutes. He is the

chairman of that committee. He has a great committee, but they have a great chairman. That committee, with its chairman, and the committee in the House have passed eight bills, at least, that the President of the United States has signed into law that do a number of things for our veterans.

We have built on previous progress for improving veterans care. A few years ago, we made the decision that veterans need to have more choices. A veteran shouldn't have to drive by a hospital they would like to go to in order to get to a hospital miles and miles away. They shouldn't have to pass three or four facilities that could do as good a job or better in order to get to a veterans facility.

There are some things our veterans facilities should do better than anybody else. They should be better at dealing with post-traumatic stress better than anybody else, although they may not be as accessible. They should be better at dealing with patients who have suffered from IED attacks, eye injuries, people who work with veterans in prosthetics, and those patients who have lost arms and legs in the service of our country. They should be pretty good at that. There is no particular reason they should be good at open heart surgery or kidney dialysis or all the other things you go to the hospital for, if that is where a veteran wants to go. We found out that a lot of veterans would rather go closer to home. A lot of veterans would like to go to the hospital they are more familiar with when they need their own healthcare. They would like to go to the hospital they have been to lots of times with other family members and others.

So we really expanded the Veterans Choice Program and expanded the money available for that program. We try to create these opportunities side by side with an existing facility. There has to be some startup money involved, but, eventually, I think our young veterans will find that they can almost always find a hospital they would rather go to or a doctor they would rather see.

We have increased compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities. World War II veterans, such as Arla Harrell from St. Louis, who suffered a lifetime of illness because he was part of a mustard gas experiment, is finally getting both compensation and the recognition that throughout his lifetime his health was impacted by something that happened while he was serving his country.

We have continued efforts to address the problems at the Veterans' Administration by passing legislation to modernize the outdated benefits claims appeals process to make it easier for VA employees to be fired for misconduct.

We want to protect employees who point out what is wrong. There have been plenty of whistles being blown at the VA over the last decade. While we want to be sure people can blow those whistles, we also want to be sure that the VA can quickly and effectively re-

move employees who are not doing what they ought to be doing and, in fact, are aggressively doing, in some cases, things they shouldn't be doing.

We worked to expand the possibility and the opportunity for education benefits by expanding what can happen under the post-9/11 GI bill, helping to connect veterans with employers who provide benefits and programs. The HIRE Vets Act, a bill I sponsored in the Congress, was part of the first major pieces of legislation the Congress passed this year. I think that, sometime in the next few weeks, the Department of Labor is going to be talking about how we will recognize and evaluate employers who hire veterans, who give veterans credit for skills they learned in the military, and who promote veterans. To every employer who hires veterans, that is a good thing and we should want to do that. The HIRE Vets Act, like the LEED standard for energy, creates a standard so that we can recognize companies that do that in a significant way. I am pleased that Secretary Acosta in the Department of Labor has put that on a fast track so these companies can be recognized for what they do.

Our veterans have worked hard and have put themselves in danger to keep us safe. As legislators, we owe them, as we owe those who follow in their footsteps, our continued efforts to ensure that those defending our country have everything they need and to show that we are also grateful to those who have defended our country in the past.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

MR. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I wish to thank Senator BLUNT, the distinguished Senator from Missouri, for his eloquent remarks on veterans and in support of all the things the Presiding Officer and I have tried to do on the Veterans' Affairs Committee and for pointing out the many reasons we in America are so proud of the veterans in service, who allow you and I to be here today. Were it not for our veterans, this Republic would not exist.

I was wondering how I would start out this speech. I did an interview with a reporter who wanted to ask me a number of questions about the current administration and what we were doing for veterans. It turned out to be a 35- or 40-minute interview.

I said I had to go, and he said: I have one more question for you.

This was by phone. So I couldn't look him in the eye, and he couldn't see me.

He said: I have one more question for you.

When you hear that from a reporter, that means the zinger is coming.

He said: Don't you think we could save a lot of money if we didn't fight in any more wars?

I thought for a minute. I said: We probably could, but there wouldn't be any reason for you and me to exist if we didn't fight any more wars, because

America is the place where everybody wants to be because we are safe and we are free and we are independent, because we fight and defend what we have as a country. I thought I would bring that up in my speech today because that is the reason we celebrate veterans today. So we give thanks to the men and women who volunteer, who served our country in the wars overseas, in the battles overseas, and, sometimes, in the challenges domestically to protect us and keep us free.

America is a great country. We don't find anybody trying to break out of the United States of America. They are all trying to break in and for a very good reason. It is a safe and free place to raise a family, to start a business, and to serve in many other ways.

So this year, on the 11th day, at the 11th hour and the 11th minute of November, when we celebrate Veterans Day, pause for a minute to say thanks for those who have come and gone and for those who are still here who fight to serve and protect us.

Always remember that the Congress, shortly after the end of World War I, decided that the 11th day—the day the armistice was signed—of the 11th month, November, with the 11th hour being 11 o'clock in the morning, would be the time the bell would toll to celebrate and pay tribute to those veterans. So at 11:11:11 this November 11, we are all going to toll that bell one more time to give thanks for our veterans for all they have done for us and for all they will do for us in the future.

It is best, when you talk about veterans, to talk about them as the people they were and the people they are, whether they are alive or whether they have passed on. I want to talk about two veterans whose paths have crossed my life to point out why we owe them so much and why we have so much to be thankful for. One of them is Jackson Elliott Cox, III of Burke County, GA, which is the Bird Dog Capital of North America. It has raised and trained more bird dogs than anywhere else in the country. It is the home of a nuclear power plant, the Plant Vogtle. It is a beautiful rural county in Georgia.

Jack was my best friend in college. We met in 1962; we graduated in 1966. I will never forget that the last time I saw Jack was when he was shipping out to go to OCS in the Marine Corps. Jack had decided when he graduated that it was more important for him to volunteer and fight for our country because of what was going on in Vietnam than do anything else, so he voluntarily joined the Marine Corps, went to OCS, got his commission as an officer, and became a captain in the U.S. Marine Corps. He fought and he died in Vietnam.

I will never forget the last words he told me when we put him on the bus from Waynesboro, GA, to Atlanta, ultimately, to be shipped out. What he said is: Johnny, I am sure I am coming back. Don't worry about me. Just pray for me. But in case I don't, make sure

people remember who Jackson Elliott Cox III was.

I said: Jack, I will do that.

Sure enough, 2 years later he was shot and killed by a sniper in Vietnam. He lost his life at the age of 24. He was the finest human being I had ever known, the nicest guy I had ever met, and my favorite friend in all of my life. He was taken from me because he volunteered to serve and fight for our country.

I am going to keep today on the floor of the U.S. Senate the promise I made to him at the bus station. I want you to know who Jackson Elliott Cox III was. He was a good old country boy from South Georgia who volunteered to serve his country and risked his life and gave his life so that you and I could be here today.

There are thousands of Jackson Elliott Coxes all over the world. In fact, there are millions all over the country. There are hundreds of thousands of them, and we have so much to thank them for because less than 1 percent of our population has worn the uniform, been in the battle, and fought to save us and protect us as Jackson Elliott Cox did.

When you have your chance to meet and become friends with a veteran—and all of you will—remember you owe them a debt of gratitude. At some time, when you get the chance to pay that debt back, do what I am doing today. Don't let their memory ever be lost or forgotten no matter where you go or where life takes you because you wouldn't get to where you are going, had they not allowed you to be safe and free to travel that route.

The second name I am going to mention is Noah Harris. Noah was from Ellijay, GA. Noah was a cheerleader at the University of Georgia. On September 11, 2001, he turned on his television to see 3,000 innocent citizens, most of them Americans, die in the Twin Towers when al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden and the axis of evil attacked our country, took our innocence, killed our people, and changed the world forever.

Noah was a cheerleader. We don't have a mandatory draft anymore. You don't have to serve, and he was not serving. He was going to graduate in a year and a half. He wanted to be an architect.

The next morning, after 9/11, when he left his dorm, he went to the Army ROTC building at the University of Georgia campus. He walked in and said: I want to go to OCS. I want to go. After what I saw on TV last night, I want to go fight and get the people who did that to my country and my friends.

They said: No, Mr. Harris you can't do that. OCS is a 2-year program at the university, and you are graduating next year. You don't have enough time to do it.

He said: I will double up on my studies. I will do whatever. I want to go. I want to fight for my country and fight the axis of evil.

They let him in, and he did. He graduated with honors. A few months later, he graduated as second lieutenant from the U.S. Army at Fort Benning in Georgia. Before too long, he was in Gazaria in Iraq, a suburb of Baghdad, handing Beanie Babies out of one pocket while the other pocket of his field jacket had his ammunition. He was trying to win over the hearts of the Iraqi children while he was fighting to preserve freedom for them and return their country to some form of a democracy or republic, away from the captives of Saddam Hussein.

I knew Noah casually. I know his parents well—Rick and Lucy Harris. I know they have mourned every day since they lost Noah in Baghdad when he died in an IED accident, but I know how proud they are of what he did and why he did it. I am proud he was my friend, and I am proud to have known him as well. I am proud to be able to stand on the floor of the U.S. Senate today and talk about Noah Harris and talk about Jackson Elliott Cox, who were exemplary of all the others who have served in the military—men and women, rich and poor, Black and White, who have gone and fought the battle and borne the battle for us so that we could be where we are today.

It kind of reminds me of the person who went to Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia shortly after the Constitution was adopted in Constitution Hall and said: Mr. Franklin, what have you given us?

He paused for a minute and said: "A republic, if you can keep it."

We have kept it. We have kept it because we have subscribed to the Constitution but also because we have a militia and a military. We are willing to fight for what we believe in, protect our citizens, and keep our country free. The country that our Founding Fathers gave to us, that was nurtured in the early days of this Republic, which now is hundreds of years old, is still there today for lots of reasons but, principally, the undergirding foundation is a strong and vibrant military.

When Veterans Day comes, give thanks for the veterans you know. Mention a couple of them, as I have done here, so their memory and their names never die, but also so we can lift them up at a time when we pause for just a minute to say thank you for the greatest country on the face of this Earth.

Senator BLUNT talked about our committee and what we have done this year. I want to take just a minute to reiterate some of the things he said. There are no Democratic veterans and no Republican veterans; there are only American veterans. They don't go to the battlefield as a partisan; they go to the battlefield as an American, and they fight for us whether we are Republicans or Democrats. They risk their own life and sometimes sacrifice it so that we can do what Ben Franklin said: Keep that republic. We owe them a lot. In fact, in many cases, we owe them everything.

We have had a mess at the VA in the last 10 years. They have been the lead story on USA Today more than any other agency in the government for failures of the VA to do the job that should have been done. Under David Shulkin, the Secretary of the VA appointed by President Trump, under the leadership of our committees in the House and the Senate, and under a commitment to bipartisan service by all our Members—which means we do almost everything unanimously and, if not unanimously, almost unanimously because it is not about getting Republican credit or Democratic credit; it is about doing the right thing for the right people who have done so much for us—we passed the Whistleblower Protection Act this year to give whistleblowers in the VA the protection they need to go and turn in to the authorities those employees in the Veterans Administration who are not doing their job. We have given them the safe harbor they need to encourage them to help us root out problems, and we are doing that.

We passed the accountability bill to shine the light of sunshine on the employees of the VA and to give the authorities in the VA the ability to terminate and fire, if you will, for cause an employee who is not doing the job they should be doing for our veterans. So we hold a standard of accountability up a little higher for our employees in the Veterans Administration.

We are magnifying choice so that our veterans can have more choice in their healthcare. We can use the private sector as a force multiplier so that the government doesn't have to hire all the doctors and physicians and assistants to service the VA. We can get them in the private sector as well.

In the 21st century GI bill, we finally made sure that the GI bill applies to everyone, not just World War II or Vietnam war-era veterans but veterans of all conflicts and of all times.

We have done everything we can to see to it that the benefits, which we promised them would be there when they left the military, are there for them in retirement and in their later life. The sacrifices they make are great, and the sacrifices we have made to save our veterans are great.

Today veterans come home from the battlefield 90 percent of the time when they are wounded. They come home, whereas, in World War I, 10 percent came home, and 90 percent died on the battlefield. But because of the advancements we have made in armor and protection and healthcare services, a lot of veterans today live when they would not have lived just 25 or 30 years ago.

The injuries they sustain are far greater than any injuries we have known in warfare before. The signature illnesses are PTSD, post-traumatic stress syndrome, or traumatic brain injury or a prosthesis for an arm or a leg or an eye or some part of the body that is lost in battle. But the trunk of the

body is protected by new Kevlar vests that are impenetrable by a bullet, so most of them succumb to IEDs and explosives and things of that nature.

We have the healthcare to provide them with the best possible rehabilitation we can, but you can never really replace a leg or an eye or a body part. Once somebody has sacrificed it forever, they wear the burden of the battle and of war.

We have an obligation, as the Veterans Administration, as the Congress of the United States in the House and the Senate, to see to it that we back up those promises our recruiters made when they came to join the military, to see to it that they get those services from their Veterans Administration.

Dr. David Shulkin is doing a phenomenal job. My ranking member, JON TESTER, Democrat from Montana, is doing a fantastic job. The House committee is doing a great job. The Members of the Senate are doing a great job.

In a week and a half, we are going to have our final bill of the year which, when we pass it, will make us 8 for 8. We will have totally reformed the VA and worked with the VA to reform it in such a way that our veterans get better service, our taxpayers get more accountability for the dollars we spend, and America remains the great country it has always been—safe and free because of those who volunteer to fight and are willing to die on behalf of our country.

So sometime on the 11th day and, hopefully, at the 11th hour and the 11th minute of that hour on November 11, you will pause for a minute and remember I told you that is when we celebrate Veterans Day because, at the time the armistice was signed in World War I, our country decided that would be the perfect time to remember all those who have fought in the past.

Let's look around, and every time we see a man or woman in uniform, stop and say "Thank you for your service" because those are the people who are risking their lives so that you and I can do whatever it is we choose to do in this land of the free and home of the brave.

There are lots of things to be thankful for but nothing more important than the men and women of the U.S. military. May God bless our country, may God bless our veterans, may God bless the United States of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak today on the floor of the Senate after my esteemed colleague from the State of Georgia. My colleague is the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I just want to express my appreciation for his commitment and his work on behalf of all of our great veterans.

Like him, I rise today to speak in tribute to our veterans and men and

women in uniform and all that they do for us.

This weekend at events across the country, we will pay tribute to the fine men and women who have served in our Nation's Armed Forces. Every day—but especially on Veterans Day—we honor these soldiers who have left the comforts of home and family to defend our freedoms and fight for our way of life.

Our freedoms have been secured by the sweat and sacrifice of courageous men and women who, throughout our history, have bravely done what was needed to protect our great Nation. We also recognize that those who serve do not serve alone. We appreciate, too, the sacrifices of the families and the loved ones who have supported our veterans in their service.

This Veterans Day, we will honor military members from our "greatest generation" to those men and women fighting in the War on Terror today. These Americans understand best the words of President Ronald Reagan when he said:

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same.

These men and women who have fought for and protected our country have given so much, and we cannot do enough to thank them, whether they returned from Active military duty 7 days ago or seven decades ago.

Although we can never repay our debt of gratitude, one of the most tangible ways we recognize our veterans' service is by providing these men and women with quality healthcare and support services, including education and work opportunities. With that debt in mind, let me briefly outline some initiatives that we have been working on to provide for our veterans. Congress has passed significant veterans bills this year, including legislation that holds the VA accountable and ensures that VA employees are putting our veterans first and legislation that updates and modernizes the VA's benefit claims and appeals process, reducing wait times for our veterans.

Additionally, one of my top priorities is ensuring that our veterans have access to healthcare options closer to their homes and their families.

This includes improving veterans' access to services under the Veterans Choice Program and building on the success of the Veterans Care Coordination Initiative at the Fargo VA Medical Center in my home State. This effort has decreased the wait time for scheduling an appointment under Veterans Choice from 24 days a year ago to 5 or 6 days at present. This initiative can serve as a model to help address delays in scheduling appointments through the Veterans Choice Program across the Nation.

We invited Secretary Shulkin, from North Dakota, to see this firsthand, and our Veterans Care Coordination Initiative has since been expanded to

the VA facility in Helena, MT, as well. We believe it will be expanded to other locations across the country.

We also passed an extension of the Veterans Choice Program earlier this year and secured \$2.1 billion in additional funding for the program. This gives us time to work with the VA on the next phase of the program. In addition to Veterans Choice, we are working to improve local access to long-term care for our veterans.

We secured a commitment from Secretary Shulkin to work with us on the Veterans Access to Long Term Care and Health Services Act. We have now introduced this legislation in the Senate, and a companion bill has been introduced in the House of Representatives. The legislation would remove burdensome redtape that prevents nursing homes and other healthcare providers from accepting veteran patients. Our bill allows the VA to enter into provider agreements with qualified healthcare and extended care facilities, bypassing complex Federal contracting requirements. This will give veterans more options to access long-term care services closer to their homes, their families, and to their loved ones.

In addition, earlier this year, Congress passed—and the President signed into law—the forever GI bill, which improved and extended veterans' access to education and workforce opportunities. This is part of our efforts to ensure that we are supporting our veterans as they transition back to civilian life and work here at home. These are just a few examples of our efforts to ensure our veterans have the resources and the support they have so richly earned. While we cannot say thank you enough, in this way, we can honor their courage and their sacrifice.

We honor Veterans Day because we have the greatest veterans in the world who have committed themselves to protect our Nation, and in so doing, they have transformed this country into the greatest the world has ever known. May God continue to bless our veterans and this great Nation that they have been protecting and make sure we honor the selfless service of all our men and women in uniform, of all our veterans, not only on Veterans Day but every day.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I appreciate the kind words of Senator HOEVEN and his affinity toward veterans. I am here to talk about our veterans as well.

I come at it from three different perceptions. I chair the Military Personnel Subcommittee in the Senate Armed Services Committee. We are trying to work on things to make sure that when somebody goes out of Active Duty into veteran status, we make it as productive as it can be, making sure they enter back fully into the workforce, the education opportunities, and

all the kinds of opportunities that are afforded them as a result of serving in our armed services.

I also want to take a minute to talk about the person who served but never wore a uniform, and that is the husband or the wife or the children whom, on this Veterans Day, we should also thank.

A lot of times, when I have an opportunity—I live in Charlotte, NC, where we have nearly 800,000 veterans. It is one of the largest populations of any one State—I make a point to get to the airport a little bit early so I can go up to the USO and just spend a moment meeting with people who are there transitioning from Active Duty and veterans to thank them for their service. Oftentimes, I will thank a man or woman, and they will say: I didn't serve; my husband or my wife did. I will say: By virtue of your being a military spouse, you served, as did your children.

On this Veterans Day, let's make sure we expand those thank-yous to include everybody who is affected when somebody is deployed in a dangerous place or even serving in peacetime. It is a great sacrifice, and it is one we should always show our gratitude for.

As I said, in North Carolina, we have about 800,000 veterans. We also have one of the highest military concentrations of any State. It is the home of the Global Response Force at Fort Bragg, with over 65,000 men and women serving and 38 generals. You go down closer to the coast and you get to Jacksonville, NC, where we have Camp Lejeune. There is a debate over the pronunciation so I will pronounce it both ways, but there we have nearly 45 percent of the Marine Corps. Many people don't realize that. Stationed out of North Carolina, we could go to Seymour Johnson, we could go to New River, or go to Cherry Point and see these men and women serving every day—and the ones who served before them who are now part of our veteran population. We should thank them all for their current service or their past service.

I say to the Presiding Officer, the Senator from Arkansas, I want to thank you for your service because you served bravely in combat positions before entering the Senate. That is another amazing thing about the veterans. They continue to serve. If you go to a coffee shop, you may see a huddle of veterans around somebody who is organizing the event. That is probably a veteran making sure veterans are speaking with each other and working through some of the challenges some of them have when they are put in very difficult situations or, if you go into a community center, you will almost always see a veteran there continuing to serve, even after they ended their Active-Duty service.

On Veterans Day, we should make it a point to go to every person we know who is a veteran and thank them. We should make sure that everybody we

see in uniform—I will be at the airport probably Thursday evening or Friday. I will make it a point to go to every single person I see in uniform and thank them for their service. We owe that to them for all they do for us.

I think, on the one hand, we need to think about veterans, especially on Veterans Day, but as Senator HOEVEN said, we need to think about them every day. As a Senator, the way we do that is not just by thinking but by doing. What more can I do in my capacity on the Veterans' Affairs Committee or in my capacity on the Senate Armed Services Committee to make service easier and safer? After they move out of Active status to veteran status, what more can we do for them? There are a lot of things we can do; one is to make sure they get an opportunity to have a job that, in many cases, will leverage the skills they learned when they were in the military into private sector jobs.

Mr. President, you and I sponsored a bill—the VALOR Act—that will be brought up before the Senate that helps to actually expedite the process of having those who have served in the military to get hired. It makes it easier for employers to put them in apprenticeship positions, where maybe they leverage some of the skills they learned while on Active Duty but get them in good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families.

There are a number of other things we have to do for others who are veterans that I think are particularly important. When we talk about post-traumatic stress or talk about traumatic brain injury, those are, in some cases, invisible wounds of war. We need to make sure and understand why it is that nearly every day 20 veterans take their lives through suicide. To what extent could that be something we just simply didn't know about that veteran? Why are they disproportionately more likely to do it? Many of them, incidentally—the veterans today who have this disproportionately high amount of suicide incidents—are veterans from the Vietnam war. We need to figure out how to reach back to that population—a significant number of whom never seek VA medical services—to provide them with the resources they need to work through these sorts of challenges.

We need to make sure healthcare is available across the map. We need to recognize that challenge in North Carolina is vastly different than the same challenge in, say, South Dakota.

We have a State population of 10 million people—almost approaching 1 million veterans. When you include the spouses and families, it is well above it. We need to make sure they are getting healthcare and services where it is most convenient for them. I think some of that will be providing them with a choice to go to the doctor who makes the most sense for them. A lot of it will be providing a brick-and-mortar presence of the VA so they can be

among other people who are actually dealing with the same sorts of circumstances, and they are actually being served by—about half the population in our veterans hospitals and our healthcare centers are veterans themselves.

This is a very important part of the broader solution we need to provide to our veterans as we continue to build a relationship with them for the rest of their lives. We will never finish all the work we should do. We will keep on making installments into a debt we can never repay, but what we need to do on November 11 is support our veterans by showing our gratitude and our thanks for their service. On this Veterans Day, make an extra effort to thank a veteran. Thank a veteran spouse. Thank the child of a veteran for their service to this great Nation. We will never be able to fully repay the debt we owe them, but we can make a lot of installments as individual citizens and as Members of this Congress. As long as I am in the Senate, that is what I intend to do.

I say to the Presiding Officer, thank you, again, for your service, and thank you to all the men and women who served before.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### HEALTHCARE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I appreciate all of my colleagues from both sides of the aisle who will be joining us here this afternoon and thank them for their leadership on our legislation and for taking the time to speak today.

We are now exactly 1 week into open enrollment, and it has been 3 weeks since Chairman ALEXANDER and I put forward a bipartisan bill to stabilize our healthcare markets and lower patients' healthcare costs. So I wanted to come this afternoon to talk for a few minutes about what it means that so many people nationwide are signing up for coverage and why there is no good reason for Republican leadership to wait another minute before bringing up our bill for a vote.

It is still early, but what we are seeing so far is that millions of people across our country are going to healthcare.gov to shop for coverage. Some 200,000 signed up on the first day. That is more than double the amount from last year. The vast majority will get tax credits to help cover their costs. In fact, some who are struggling the most will find they can save even

more this year because of how our current healthcare system absorbs cost increases.

But there is no question that premiums are going up in many places and that fewer coverage options are available and not every consumer is protected. One woman—Melissa—told the Washington Post this week that she is “joining the ranks of the uninsured” for the first time in her life as a 51-year-old. She said that she doesn't qualify for subsidies and that given how much her premiums would increase, her insurance costs would have been more than her mortgage payments each month. Melissa is one of the people paying the price for President Trump's healthcare sabotage and the Republican leadership's—so far—willingness to cheer him along.

It is unacceptable that patients and families are having to take on this burden. Let's remember that when someone goes to sign up for healthcare coverage, they are not doing it as a Republican or a Democrat, they are doing it as a parent or a caregiver or a business owner who wants to stay healthy and financially secure.

Here in Washington, DC, healthcare has become bogged down in politics, but in cities and towns across the country, it is about taking care of yourselves and your loved ones. That is why so many people are going online to shop for coverage despite the President's insistence that healthcare in the United States was going to “implode,” regardless of the fact that to make implosion a reality, President Trump—among his many other efforts at sabotage—shortened the enrollment period this year and gutted investments in outreach and advertising and caused premiums for those people to increase by double digits on the average. Patients and families deserve so much better.

I have said it before: The frustrating thing is that all this could have been avoided. Way back in September, Chairman ALEXANDER and I were on the verge of an agreement to stabilize healthcare markets and lower premiums for the coming year and for 2019. Our agreement would have provided multiyear certainty on the out-of-pocket cost reduction subsidies that President Trump decided to stop paying even though the law says he is required to do so. Had we been able to move faster, our legislation would have resulted in lower premiums right away for 2018. But Republican leaders pressed the “pause” button on bipartisan negotiations so they could try one more time to jam partisan repeal through the Senate, and we lost a lot of precious time.

Our bill, the Lamar Alexander-Patty Murray Senate bill, would do a lot of good right now and over the next years. If Republican leadership takes up our legislation now and passes it, families would see rebates this year and lower healthcare costs next year because our bill is designed to ensure

that the benefit of greater certainty is passed on to patients and taxpayers, not hoarded by insurance companies.

Our deal would also invest in open enrollment and outreach for 2019, so more people would be covered. It would allow States more flexibility to innovate as the Affordable Care Act always intended. It would mark a critical step away from this harmful partisanship on healthcare and toward working under regular order on solutions that make healthcare work better for the people we serve.

Finally, this legislation would send a critical message to patients and families that when Congress sets aside partisan difference and focuses on what is best for our country, we can deliver a result, as Chairman ALEXANDER often says.

More than 200 groups representing doctors, hospitals, State officials, Governors, and patients have endorsed our bill. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says it would do exactly what it was intended to do—stabilize markets and bring down healthcare costs—while returning \$3.8 billion to taxpayers.

Twelve Senate Democrats and 12 Senate Republicans cosponsored it. We are continuing to build support, and there is no question that it would pass here with a filibuster-proof majority if it were brought to the floor. And while the Senate shouldn't need President Trump's signoff to take a position on ways to fix the Nation's healthcare system, the President has supported this process moving forward.

So here we are, and right now it is up to Republican leaders. They can choose to stay in a partisan corner and reject an opportunity to lower patients' healthcare costs in a bipartisan way, or they can do what people across the country want them to do and put patients over politics.

I do want to note that if Republican leaders hadn't gotten the message, voters made it pretty clear last night that they reject the deeply harmful partisanship we have seen on healthcare.

It is well past time for Republican leaders to give up the ghost on TrumpCare, declare it dead, and work with Democrats to get real solutions. That starts with our bipartisan bill to lower healthcare costs and stabilize the markets, because if they don't, they can be sure they will be held accountable.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleague from Washington, Senator MURRAY, and congratulate her and Senator ALEXANDER on being able to reach agreement to move forward to address the uncertainty in the marketplace.

Like Senator MURRAY, I also want to begin with what we are seeing going on in this open enrollment period. Despite all of the efforts to undermine the Affordable Care Act, to shorten the time

period in which people can sign up, to make it more difficult by having the site closed for part of Sundays, we are seeing a record number of people enroll in the initial days of open enrollment.

According to news reports, on the first day alone, about 1 million people visited [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov) and more than 200,000 people selected a plan for 2018. That is almost double the number who signed up last year on the first day.

For anybody who is still thinking about it, you have until December 15, so sign up early. As my colleague from New Hampshire, Senator HASSAN, says, it is the best Christmas shopping you can do—take care of your healthcare. Go to [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov) and shop around, get the best deal, and enroll during this open enrollment period.

This surge in signups is especially remarkable in light of the widely publicized efforts by the Trump administration to depress enrollment. The administration has slashed the advertising and outreach budget by 90 percent, cut the open enrollment period by half, and shut down the marketplace website for 12 hours on Sundays, taking away valuable weekend hours when people have free time to explore plans.

I think the healthy volume of enrollments sends two very important messages.

First, it shows again that ordinary citizens, faith groups, insurance navigators, and other private organizations have done an amazing job of filling the outreach void that has been created by this effort by the administration to cut back on letting people know about the website and how to enroll. Those folks have spent countless hours getting out the word that the Affordable Care Act remains the law of the land and that those who qualify for financial assistance can purchase high-quality, affordable coverage.

The second message that I think is important from this strong enrollment is a message that has been echoed in recent public opinion polls. It is one that we saw in the turnout in the Virginia elections last night. It is that a clear majority of the American people support the Affordable Care Act, that they reject efforts to sabotage it and they want Members of Congress to work together to strengthen it, just as Senator MURRAY said.

I am very pleased that we have come together in the Senate to do just that. We have come together in support of bipartisan efforts led by Senator MURRAY and Senator LAMAR ALEXANDER, the chair and ranking member of the HELP Committee. They have come together to stabilize the Affordable Care Act and the marketplaces and bring down premiums. I am proud to be one of the 12 Democrats who were original cosponsors with 12 Republicans of this legislation. This balanced agreement, which was negotiated by Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAY over many months, is our best bet for restoring stability to the marketplaces in the

short run and giving us the time we need to negotiate longer term to deal with other changes to the health law to make it work better.

I am especially pleased that the Alexander-Murray agreement provides for the continuation of cost-sharing reduction payments, or CSRs, which are payments that are necessary to keep premiums, deductibles, and copayments affordable for working families. They are extended for 2 years in this bill. Without these payments, the cost of coverage will skyrocket, insurers will leave the marketplaces—as we have already seen, as the Trump administration has said they are going to discontinue those payments—and millions of people will lose their health coverage. This is an opportunity for us to keep that from happening. Both Democrats and Republicans have recognized that these cost-sharing reduction payments, these CSRs, are an orderly, necessary subsidy that keeps down the cost of health coverage for everyday Americans.

In recent months, I have heard from hundreds of people across New Hampshire about the enormous difference that healthcare reform has made in their lives. We are a small State—we have just over 1.3 million people—but nearly 94,000 Granite Staters have gotten individual health coverage through the Obama marketplace, and nearly 50,000 have gotten coverage thanks to the Medicaid expansion, which had bipartisan support in New Hampshire. So that is about a tenth of New Hampshire that is covered either through the Affordable Care Act or through the expansion of Medicaid. And for us in New Hampshire, it has been particularly critical in responding and providing treatment to those people with substance use disorders.

Patricia Tucker has written to me. She is a substance use disorder counselor in Northfield, NH, and she talks about how grateful she is for the Medicaid expansion. She writes:

I am seeing people come for help that were not able to get help in the past because they couldn't afford it. They are getting help and remaining abstinent. If one mother gets clean, this affects so many others.

She goes on to say:

[I treat] one mother who has two children. She now cares for these children and has a full-time job. In the past, she lived off the state and did not care for anyone, including herself. Multiply this by thousands, just in New Hampshire, and this makes such a big difference.

And think about how across the country we have affected people with substance use disorders because they can now get treatment.

I agree with Patricia Tucker and so many others who have contacted me about the Affordable Care Act. We are grateful for the progress, and we refuse to be taken backward. That is why the bipartisan agreement hammered out by Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY is such an important breakthrough. This agreement stands on its

merits as a good-faith, win-win compromise. But just as important and maybe even more important, these two Senators have given us a template for bipartisan negotiations on other critical matters that lie ahead, including tax reform, reauthorizing the community health centers and the Children's Health Insurance Program, and reaching an agreement on the 2018 budget.

The Senate is at its best when we observe regular order, when we honor the committee process, and when we work across the aisle and make principled compromises and get big things done for the American people.

In a Senate that is nearly evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats, bipartisanship is the only productive way forward. This is how the great majority of Americans want us to conduct the Senate's business, and this is especially true on matters such as healthcare and tax reform that impact families in New Hampshire and all across America.

I am grateful to people across our country who have gotten out the word about the health insurance open enrollment period that began on November 1 and continues through December 15. I am heartened by the surge in enrollments. I am encouraged by bipartisan progress in the Senate to stabilize the health insurance marketplaces. I certainly hope the leadership in the Senate allows this bill to come to the floor because we know we have the votes to pass it.

Instead of partisan efforts to undermine the law and take health insurance away from people, let's embrace the spirit of the Alexander-Murray agreement. Let's work together in a good-faith, bipartisan fashion to build a healthcare system that leaves no American behind.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. FRANKEN. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the importance of bipartisan action on healthcare, as the Senator from New Hampshire just did.

Over the past year, I have traveled all around Minnesota to talk with individuals and families and community leaders about healthcare. I have heard from mothers and fathers who have been worried about losing the healthcare their children need to access lifesaving services. I have heard from daughters who have been panicked about how to pay for their parents' long-term care and prescription drug costs. I have heard from hospital executives in rural areas, much like the rural areas in Arkansas, who have been concerned about how they are going to keep their doors open.

What is abundantly clear from all of these conversations is that Minnesotans want Congress to work together to build on the Affordable Care Act, lower healthcare costs, and support policies that work. That is why I believe, first, that Congress must act immediately to

pass bipartisan legislation to stabilize the individual market. Second, we must do all we can to support strong enrollment in our health insurance exchanges so that all consumers, regardless of their health needs, can find high-quality, affordable health insurance coverage. Third, it is time to reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program. Let me take each of those in turn.

When Republican efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act failed, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee got to work and developed a bipartisan plan to stabilize the individual market. As a member of that committee, I participated in numerous hearings with witnesses who spanned the ideological spectrum, solicited input from State and national leaders, and worked in good faith with all of my colleagues to develop legislation that is truly a compromise bill.

This legislation, referred to as the Alexander-Murray deal, will contain healthcare costs for consumers, provide certainty to insurers participating in these markets, and provide States with the flexibility they need to develop innovative, local solutions. I am proud of what we were able to accomplish.

What I am most proud of is that this bill includes a provision that will reverse a decision by the Trump administration that would effectively punish Minnesota for pushing forward a bipartisan plan to stabilize the individual market—a bipartisan plan in our State legislature.

Last year, after our State experienced dramatic premium rate hikes in the individual markets, State leaders worked together in a bipartisan way to pass a reinsurance program to contain these costs, but the program's enactment was contingent upon approval from the Federal Government.

After months of foot-dragging, the Federal Government finally approved the State's reinsurance plan as part of the 1332 waiver proposal, but the Federal Government simultaneously cut Federal funding for MinnesotaCare, which is another program in the State that provides affordable health coverage to working families. Thus, our State had to choose whether to support a bipartisan proposal to stabilize the individual market and lower premiums for consumers or swallow hundreds of millions of dollars in lost Federal funding. It was an impossible choice that was completely unnecessary. That is why I set to work to fix it.

After weeks of productive negotiations, I am pleased to report that the Alexander-Murray deal will prevent the Trump administration from imposing these cuts on Minnesota. But my State wasn't the only one threatened by potential funding cuts. The Alexander-Murray bill would prevent such problems from occurring in any other State as well, and it would do much more.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, this agreement would reduce the deficit by billions of dollars, lower

premiums in 2019, and preserve coverage options for individuals and families. In short, it is not only good for Minnesota, it is good for the entire country. This bill is a bipartisan win-win-win.

Now our job is to pass this legislation into law. At the same time, we must do everything we can to drive up enrollment in the health insurance exchanges. Regardless of party, if we want to ensure that consumers have access to affordable, high-quality health insurance coverage, we have to get people to sign up for the coverage. More people equals better risk pools, which equals lower premiums. It is really that simple.

Look, the Trump administration has done everything in its power to undermine ObamaCare. It has halved the amount of time that people have to enroll in coverage, it slashed funding for outreach and enrollment efforts, and it deliberately misled consumers about the benefits of the ACA and individual requirements for coverage. But we have the power to combat these efforts.

Let's get people enrolled. Open enrollment started on November 1 and will end for most people on December 15. Minnesotans are lucky in that they have until January 14 to sign up for coverage. But everyone who doesn't receive coverage from their employer or through Medicare needs to sign up now, so I urge my colleagues to get their constituents to visit [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov) and shop around and then enroll in coverage.

Lastly, it is time to reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program, community health centers, and the National Health Service Corps. These have always been bipartisan programs. There is no reason this should be any different today.

The anxiety that people in Minnesota and across the country feel about their access to healthcare is not inevitable; it is the result of political decisions made here in Washington, DC. Let's prove to the country that we are not here to fight with each other, we are here to fight for them. Let's show them that we can get something done. Let's take action to protect healthcare and give our constituents, at long last, some peace of mind.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today to call for bipartisan action on healthcare.

I think it was interesting to learn that the citizens of Virginia who voted yesterday listed as their top issue

healthcare. There was obviously an issue there where there had been no Medicaid expansion, and they were unhappy with the way it had been handled by the legislature there as well as Republicans who were in charge of the legislature, and they appeared to be pushing for a change.

We have an opportunity here to make a bipartisan change. I think it is exactly the kind of message that we got yesterday. In my State, we have a Republican legislature and a Democratic Governor. They came together to do something about some of the rates, particularly in our rural areas. They focused on reinsurance, cost sharing—some of the things in the bipartisan agreement reached between Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY. We have 12 Democrats and 12 Republicans cosponsoring that bill. Support includes the American Cancer Society, the American Diabetes Society, the March of Dimes, and the Arthritis Foundation—and those are just the A's.

The American people want us to work together to make fixes to the Affordable Care Act. The day it passed, I said that it was a beginning and not an end. Unfortunately, we have been stymied in trying to make those kind of changes, and this is one bipartisan big opportunity to do it. I think it is a sensible bipartisan approach.

As we all know, both Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY held a series of hearings and discussions on commonsense solutions to bring down insurance costs with Senators on both sides of the aisle. There were Governors and insurance experts, and we worked hard to make sure there was some agreement on this bill. I fought for provisions that would help States apply for and receive waivers to give them some flexibility to construct their healthcare system and to bring down the costs without losing Federal funding. That is something my State did. As I mentioned, my State, with a Republican-led legislature and a Democratic Governor, came together to apply for a waiver and a reinsurance provision.

The bill would also expedite the review of waiver applications for proposals that have already been approved for other States that are experiencing certain circumstances—emergency circumstances—where they need to make changes.

The legislation also shortens the overall time period that States would have to wait for the Federal Government to decide whether to approve their waivers.

All of these are good fundamental concepts—this idea that States should have some flexibility, that they should be able to apply for waivers, and that they should be able to get their answers as soon as possible from the Federal Government. That is what this bill is about. Not only does the bill improve the process for waivers and flexibility for the States, like we have seen in Minnesota, where already the projected

numbers brought the rates down something like 20 percent, but the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office says the Murray-Alexander bill would actually cut the deficit by \$3.8 billion over the next 10 years. That is hard to argue with.

It is clear that this legislation could get support from both sides of the aisle to make healthcare better for Americans. We have a majority of Senators supporting this bill. So we need to get it done because the longer we wait, the more the markets don't know what is going on, the more confusion that is created, and the more the administration is doing things that sabotages the Affordable Care Act.

We need this stability in the system. Passing the bill would be an important step forward, but we still must do more to bring down the costs for middle-class families. A big part of that is addressing the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs. I have heard from people across Minnesota who are struggling to afford the medicine they need. This is about the woman in Duluth who told me that she chose not to fill her last prescription because that one drug would cost a whole 25 percent of her income. It is about a woman in St. Paul who, even with Medicare, couldn't afford \$663 a month for the medicine she needs. It is about someone from Crystal, MN, who told me: I am practically going without food to pay for the prescription. It is heartbreaking that this is happening in America.

Reducing the cost of prescription drugs has bipartisan support in Congress, and the President has said he wants to get something done. He has said: The drug companies are "getting away with murder." Those are his words. That is what he said.

So what can we do? Republicans and Democrats could come together and act right now. I have a bill that has 33 cosponsors that lifts the ban that makes it illegal for Medicare to negotiate prices for prescription drugs for 41 million seniors. I think 41 million seniors are pretty good at getting bargains and deals, and they deserve to have someone negotiating on their behalf; that is, the government negotiating for Medicare. Except, why don't we negotiate, like we do for the VA, and like other countries do? We don't negotiate because there is a provision in law that says that the government is not allowed to negotiate on behalf of 41 million seniors with the drug companies. They are just set. Guess what that means. That is a big part of the reason why our drug prices are double the cost of those in Canada—because we are just taking it and we are not negotiating.

Another idea, bringing up Canada, is that Senator McCain and I have a bill that would allow less expensive drugs to be sold in the United States. To me, that is a way of putting pressure on our own drug companies to put out better prices if they know there is going to be competition.

Senator GRASSLEY of Iowa and I have a bill to stop something called pay-for-delay. That is when big pharmaceutical companies actually pay off generic companies to keep less expensive products off the market. This bill would save taxpayers \$2.9 billion. Do you know why? Because right now there is no competition or very little competition, and they are actually paying their competitors to stay off the market. The competitors have decided: Well, I get more money to be paid to stay off the market than if I actually competed.

Think about what a rip-off that is for the American people. We are allowing this to go on while the consumers are paying the price. How much? We know the government alone is going to save \$2.9 billion if we stop this practice. Consumers would save most likely around that same amount because they are paying all the copays. Both the government is ripped off and the consumers are ripped off, and the only ones making money off of it are the drug companies.

Another idea is, Senator LEE and I have a bill that would allow temporary importation of safe drugs that have been on the market in another country for at least 10 years when there isn't healthy competition in our own country. Again, if your drug companies that are messing around, charging high prices and not allowing competition in—if you know there might be foreign competition coming in, that is an incentive because you want to then make sure that doesn't happen because you know that if you keep your prices high and you do things to disallow competition, you are going to have some major competition. I don't know how else we bring the prices down without allowing more competition.

I also have a bipartisan bill with Senators GRASSLEY, LEE, FEINSTEIN, and LEAHY, which is called the CREATES Act, to put a stop to other pharmaceutical company tactics, such as refusing to provide samples to generic companies that are supposed to be allowed to compete with them. According to the Congressional Budget Office, this legislation would save approximately \$3.6 billion.

As we hear about tax reform and hear about the debt we might be seeing expand if something like this goes forward, then we ask yourselves: What is not in those bills? Why aren't we saving some money for the American people and reducing the debt by allowing for this competition, by allowing for the samples, by allowing for more generics, by stopping this practice of companies paying each other to keep their competitors off the market?

What this healthcare debate has been about for the last year, where repeatedly there have been attempts to repeal the Affordable Care Act—it has been about that. The American people made it really clear, they want to make it about something else. They want to make it about improvements

to the system we have now to make it easier for them. One way is the Alexander-Murray bill, which I strongly support. I am one of the cosponsors. It is smart. It works with the States, both Democratic and Republican States—blue States, red States. We want to see that kind of flexibility. The other way is to take a stand, be willing to take on the pharmaceutical industry, and take on some of the cost issues when it comes to prescription drugs.

Let's come together in the Senate, as an initial move, and pass the Murray-Alexander bill. We must do that, and we must do it by the end of the year. Then we can go on from there to actually do something about the cost of prescription drugs.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, there are a number of matters where we disagree in the U.S. Senate, and they range from deeply held foundational beliefs to the smallest details of legislative language. Despite these disagreements, I believe there is a lot we can all agree on.

I hope I speak for every Member of Congress in saying that in this great Nation of ours, hard work should always be rewarded. If you play by the rules and do the right thing, you should have an opportunity to earn a good life for yourself and for your family. Our mothers, fathers, and others before us have worked hard to ensure that we have a fair shot at the American dream. Unfortunately, it feels like the fabric of the American dream has started to fray for far too many families. Even more troubling, we are seeing nominees from this administration who seem committed to actively unraveling the support and the protections that help workers get ahead.

Today we are considering the nomination of Peter Robb to be general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board. Mr. Robb would be responsible for ensuring safe working conditions and fair compensation for American workers. He would be tasked with protecting the treasured right of workers to engage in good-faith negotiations with their employers.

However, a brief look at Mr. Robb's career reveals a clear track record of working to undermine our Nation's workers and middle class on behalf of corporate executives. To Mr. Robb's credit, he is not trying to hide his record or run away from his record. All you have to do is visit his firm's website, and you will see the experiences he is proud to display. I believe it is a preview of how he will approach his position at the National Labor Relations Board. His self-proclaimed accomplishments include: advising large corporations on mergers, acquisitions, and plant closings; securing labor injunctions; and bringing suits against labor organizations.

When someone tells you who they are, believe them. While I certainly believe that every American and corporation is entitled to vigorous representation by their lawyers, I also believe Senators must evaluate every nominee's full body of work. Let's be clear about how Mr. Robb has chosen to spend his professional life: helping management close plants and cut jobs, suing unions, delaying workers' rights to collectively bargain, and defending companies that violate workplace safety and fair pay laws.

At a time when corporate profits and executive compensation have skyrocketed and worker wages are stagnant, I have no confidence in Mr. Robb's ability to be a neutral arbiter between labor and management, let alone advocate for the safety and the well-being of America's working men and women. Our Nation's workers deserve a nominee who will protect their right to negotiate for fair pay and safe working conditions, not someone who has spent his entire career litigating against workers. I will be voting against Mr. Robb's confirmation, and I strongly urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, today we are voting on the nomination of Peter Robb for general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board, NLRB.

As general counsel, Mr. Robb will have the important job of helping workers who feel their right to organize collectively has been violated or assisting employers when some of their employees want to form a union.

Mr. Robb will have an opportunity to help restore the Board to the role of a neutral umpire in labor disputes.

While partisanship at the Board did not start under the previous administration, it became far worse.

When the Board is too partisan, it creates instability in our Nation's workplaces and creates confusion for employers, employees, and unions.

For example, in 2015, at the previous general counsel's urging, an NLRB decision dramatically expanded "joint employer" liability, and this increased liability makes it much more likely a company will find it more practical to own and operate its stores, taking away the opportunity for a worker to own and run their own franchise.

This decision was the biggest attack on the opportunity for small business men and women to make their way into the middle class that anyone has seen in a long time, threatening to destroy the American Dream for owners of the Nation's 780,000 franchise locations.

Or consider the previous general counsel's aggressive application of the National Labor Relations Act to protect certain employees' belligerent, threatening, and discriminatory conduct.

One troubling decision involved an employer that fired a picketing em-

ployee who engaged in racist and offensive conduct on a picket line.

The Board found that the employee's remarks were "racist, offensive and reprehensible," and violated the company's nondiscrimination policies and the union's conduct rules; yet the Board still ruled that the employer's discharge of the employee was unlawful.

This type of Board decision defies common sense and makes it more difficult for employers to maintain safe workplaces free of discrimination and harassment.

Mr. Robb is extremely qualified to be general counsel of the NLRB.

He currently works as the director of labor and employment at the law firm Downs Rachlin and Marin.

He served as chief counsel to NLRB Member Robert Hunter and was a regional field attorney for the NLRB in Baltimore.

Mr. Robb earned his B.A. in economics from Georgetown University and his J.D. from the University of Maryland School of Law.

His experience and prudence will serve him well at the NLRB.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting to confirm Peter Robb for general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board.

Mr. PETERS. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### NOMINATION OF WILLIAM WEHRUM

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, the Senate has, actually, already considered Bill Wehrum to be the Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation at the Environmental Protection Agency, who is the person in charge of the rules to administer the Clean Air Act at the EPA. This person has already been considered, and the Senate decided that he was not right for the job.

Over 10 years ago, President Bush nominated Mr. Wehrum to head the Office of Air and Radiation at the EPA. He was rejected because his 6-year record as an employee at the EPA told the Senators all that they needed to know. As the ranking member, Jim Jeffords, put it at the time: "Mr. Wehrum's disdain for the Clean Air Act is alarming." If you disagree with the foundational Federal law that we use to keep our air clean, then it is hard to believe that you can competently lead the EPA's efforts when it comes to protecting our right to clean air. A decade later, nothing has changed. Mr. Wehrum has done nothing that should change our minds about his ability to lead the EPA.

This, of course, is part of a pattern. This administration continues to nominate anti-science, pro-pollution, cli-

mate-denying people to lead the U.S. agencies that are in charge of science and climate.

Scott Pruitt has denied a century's worth of established science and basic facts that say that climate change is real, urgent, and caused by humans. He now leads the No. 1 Federal Agency that is charged with working on climate change.

Then there is JIM BRIDENSTINE, who hopes to lead NASA, which is one of our Nation's top science agencies. He, too, is still on the fence about climate change.

Meanwhile, 13 Federal agencies, including the EPA and NASA, just published a dire report that reads that greenhouse gases released by human activity are to blame for rising temperatures and severe weather throughout the world.

This is why Mr. Wehrum should not go any further. It is really very simple. Our own government scientists say that climate change is real, urgent, and caused by humans.

If you do not want to take their word for it, here in the United States in this year alone, a record number of category 4 hurricanes killed dozens of people and destroyed or damaged entire communities in the southern United States and Puerto Rico. Wildfires killed dozens of people and burned more than 8.4 million acres in the Northwest. Droughts lasting for months wiped out farmers' crops and forced ranchers to sell livestock in the Midwest. The city of Seattle had soot on cars from the wildfires. For a period, the State of Montana, depending on where you were, looked like it was literally on fire.

The U.S. Forest Service's budget is soon to be more than 50 percent firefighting. This is supposed to be the Forest Service for the conservation and management of our forests, and now it is the Federal firefighting of our forests. There have been 15 severe weather events this year that have resulted in losses exceeding \$1 billion. That is what insurance companies and reinsurance companies consider to be the threshold. They consider a big event—a catastrophic event—from an insurance standpoint to be a \$1 billion event. We had 15 of them this year in the United States. In the past 10 years, the U.S. Government has spent more than \$350 billion in helping communities recover from severe weather, and that is before our getting through with the various and necessary disaster supplemental budget requests that are coming down for Florida, Houston, and Puerto Rico.

Look, severe weather is a reality or whatever you want to call it. If you feel uncomfortable politically calling it "climate change," fine, but severe weather is actually already happening. It is now a moral issue, and it is a fiscal issue. It has taken a huge toll on our economy, on the American taxpayer, and on local communities. For the most part, we do not budget for

these costs because we have decided that these are one-time events, but they just happen to be one-time events that are occurring more and more frequently and that are costing more and more.

Because of the leadership vacuum that Scott Pruitt and Donald Trump have created, States and cities and the private sector have been stepping up so that the United States can stay on track to cut carbon emissions and fight climate change. Yet the Federal Government still has a responsibility here, not just a moral responsibility but a legal one, for the climate will keep changing, the costs will keep rising, and more and more people will feel the effects. Instead of stepping up so that our Federal debt does not balloon and our coastlines do not erode and our security is not threatened, this administration keeps nominating people like Mr. Wehrum to deny that climate is an issue and that the government ought to act.

Throughout his career, Mr. Wehrum has demonstrated antipathy for the very laws that he is now going to be tasked with upholding. When he held this position in an acting capacity in the 2000s—in other words, he was filling in until he was confirmed but was never confirmed—he was sued dozens of times for not doing his job. Time and again, the courts found that, in fact, he was putting special interests over science and over the public good. This is not just a rhetorical statement. These are 27 times that Mr. Wehrum lost in court for exceeding his authorities under the law.

Here is where he kept getting specifically into trouble. Mr. Wehrum is a former lawyer for the very industries that the EPA regulates—chemical companies, utility companies, the auto industry. This is the experience that he relied on while he worked at the EPA, which is fair enough so far, but when the Agency started working on a rule that regulated pollution from powerplants, Mr. Wehrum took language from his former law firm—again, which represented powerplants—and gave it to the EPA to put into the rule. In other words, the EPA did not look to experts and scientists to decide how best to regulate powerplants; it looked to the powerplants' lawyers.

Mr. Wehrum's job was to protect clean air and public health, and he failed at that job by siding with special interests over that mission. The courts actually stepped in 27 times, and he lost 27 times. One case went all the way to the Supreme Court under Mr. Wehrum. The EPA said that it did not have the authority to regulate carbon dioxide from automobiles, but under U.S. law, the EPA must regulate all emissions that are damaging to human health and welfare, and the Supreme Court has acknowledged that carbon pollution fits that description.

Just to be clear, under the EPA's responsibility to administer the Clean Air Act, the EPA does not just have

the authority to regulate carbon emissions; it has the obligation to regulate carbon emissions. In other words, anything that is airborne that causes harm to people, to public health, must be regulated. The EPA does not simply decide which of these airborne pollutants must be regulated; it has to regulate all of those pollutants that cause damage to public health. Clearly, carbon fits that category on a commonsense level, but the Supreme Court also decided that. There have been more intense storms, as we have seen from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, and others, that are certainly bad for human health and well-being, and the Supreme Court has agreed. The EPA has the authority and the obligation to regulate these greenhouse gases.

We do not need to go through this again. Mr. Wehrum has already shown that he is not the right leader for the EPA. He will not commit to taking the necessary steps to address severe weather. He will not fight for clean air. He will fight for his former clients. This is not an accusation. It is based on exactly what he did when he was in the same position. It is the reason the Senate rejected him 10 years ago.

With this kind of information in front of us, there is no way we can put Mr. Wehrum back in charge of the office that is tasked with regulating carbon pollution, not when we are facing a planetary emergency, not when the fiscal and human costs of inaction are so clear. The EPA needs leadership that understands the crisis we are facing and that understands and is willing to do everything in its power to address it. Mr. Wehrum has clearly demonstrated that he is not the right person for this job. I will vote no on this nominee, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

There will now be 30 minutes of debate, equally divided between the leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Colorado.

#### TAX REFORM

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about a historic opportunity that will soon be before this body. It is an opportunity to bring real relief to the American people. It is an opportunity to jolt our economy into a higher gear and bring real, tangible benefits to America's hard-working families.

It has been over 30 years since this country last reformed its Tax Code. Over those 30 years, we have seen a lot of change. We have seen the country move from Ataris to smartphones and Wi-Fi. This photo shows a Ford LTD

station wagon, which rolled off the assembly line 30 years ago. It is a car that any of us would have been excited to drive 30 years ago. Today we have cars that drive themselves. Unfortunately, we still have a tax code that is made for this LTD.

So while the world has changed around us and other countries have learned to craft tax codes to entice businesses to grow, our code has gotten more and more out of date and more and more laden with special-interest giveaways. Our Tax Code has turned Main Street into a dead end and our overseas growth into a one-way street.

Reforming the code is not only a way to give us an opportunity to end those giveaways, but it can also boost our economy. I applaud our colleagues in the House, who last week introduced and are working on a proposal to overhaul the tax system. In the coming days the Senate Finance Committee will introduce their own legislation.

While I will mostly focus my comments today on one aspect of tax reform, I will note that on Friday the Tax Foundation released its analysis of the House tax proposal. This analysis concluded that the House proposal would create 975,000 full-time-equivalent jobs and push GDP 3.9 percent higher than it would otherwise be. Taking into account the economic feedback from the proposed reforms, this means taxpayers would end up with 4.4 percent higher income. In other words, they will make greater, higher income as a result of the bill that the House is working on today. Indeed, the Tax Foundation concluded that the total after-tax gain in income for a middle-class family would be nearly \$2,600.

Importantly, for my constituents in my home State of Colorado, the gain would be over \$3,000. These are serious gains that will bring real, meaningful benefits to hard-working Americans. This is just the starting point for our reform. This number is over \$3,000 of impact to the people of Colorado of additional income and tax relief. When a significant segment of Americans don't even have access within 24 hours to just a few hundred dollars, a \$3,000 a year gain is a significant amount of money.

Today I would like to focus on one part of the tax reform package, and that is the lowering of taxes on America's job creators. Because we have this clunky Atari-era Tax Code—this Ford LTD station wagon Tax Code, our tax rates are no longer competitive. They encourage companies to invest abroad rather than right here at home in the United States. Back in 1986, when this car rolled off the assembly line, our corporate rate was competitive. It didn't discourage companies from investing in the United States.

Things have significantly changed since 1986. Foreign countries have figured it out. They lowered their tax rates, and now the United States has the highest corporate tax rate in the

developed world—indeed, one of the highest tax rates in the world, period. Consequently, businesses have moved abroad more and more. They invested more abroad, and in the United States they have invested less and less.

It is not in the Republicans' view alone. I would draw your attention to this quote right here. President Obama noted this gradual deterioration of the corporate tax code in his 2011 State of the Union Address, saying:

[O]ver the years, a parade of lobbyists has rigged the tax code to benefit particular companies and industries. Those with accountants or lawyers to work the system can end up paying no taxes at all. But all the rest are hit with one of the highest corporate tax rates in the world. It makes no sense, and it has to change.

Those are the words that President Barack Obama spoke to a joint session of Congress in 2011 in his State of the Union Address.

The Council of Economic Advisers estimates that just moving the tax rates on corporations from the uncompetitive 35 percent to the middle-of-the-pack 20 percent and adding permanent full expensing of capital investments would increase GDP from 3 percent to 5 percent above what is currently forecasted. That increase would not just happen in a decade or two, it would be front-loaded, meaning that we would see a fast response from this economy, with 2.4 percent to 3.2 percent higher GDP in the first 3 to 5 years under this proposal. That boost will not just be to the corporate bottom line. It will increase the average American household income by \$4,000.

Let me say that again. It will increase average household income in America by \$4,000.

Since these estimates were released, since those numbers, statistics, and analysis have been done, opponents of pro-growth tax reform have thrown everything they can at the proposals and estimates to see what will stick to try to bring it down. They said these numbers are too rosy. They said that we can't possibly get a \$4,000 increase in average household income because that would mean more money would end up in bank accounts of American households than is raised in revenue by the corporate income tax.

They said that corporations have been "rolling in money" for a long time. So if they wanted to invest in America they already would have. Some opponents say we should tax corporations more—take the profit that is sitting overseas and spend it as the government wishes. When opponents of tax relief see a company with money, their reaction is to take it—to take it like it is the Government's money. But we know that doesn't work. Even our European friends, whose residents tend to be far more open to socialist experiments, have rejected this notion. They know that tax reform is about creating the environment that will cause companies to invest in America, not attempting to seize profits from compa-

nies that can easily move elsewhere. That is why France, Germany, Spain, Italy, and Greece—not exactly bastions of open economic innovation—have lower corporate tax rates than we do.

The chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, Kevin Hassett, told the Joint Economic Committee recently:

This is not about right wing parties throwing money at rich corporations. It is about economically literate governments understanding that if we want wages to be higher, then we have to give workers capital to work with.

Let me say that again. This effort for tax relief is about "economically literate governments understanding that if we want wages to be higher, then we have to give workers capital to work with."

Let's go back to the first response we heard from opponents of tax relief: It is "absurd" to think the average American household will get \$4,000 more in income because that is more than the country raises in tax revenue.

In other words, if we took every dollar raised from corporate tax and handed it over to American families, they wouldn't get \$4,000. That is the argument opponents of tax reform are saying, but this response simply doesn't get it.

What is the economically literate perspective?

Recall that a lot has changed over the last 30 years, but one thing hasn't changed, and that is the U.S. corporate tax rate. As you can see on this chart, the average OECD tax rates have dropped over time. You see the blue OECD line, and the orange line on the chart is straight across. The average OECD tax rates have dropped over time, but the U.S. rate stayed right where it is. The U.S. advantages that made it the place to invest in 1986 have slowly faded away. Other countries have used their tax rates to become more competitive, and companies have responded.

Business investment now is unfortunately low. Indeed, Chairman Hassett warned that there is a crisis in our country because of the lack of what is called capital deepening, which is just an economist's term for the impact of capital stock—things such as equipment, structures, and intellectual property—on worker productivity.

Worker productivity is, in turn, what drives up wages. That is what makes wages increase. The more productive a worker is, the more the employer is willing to pay that worker to keep him or her in the job with rising wages.

Going to another chart, we can see the effects of that. Prior to 1990, when corporate profits were going up by 1 percent, workers' wages went up by more than 1 percent. Since that time in the 1990s, we have seen change. From 2008 to 2016, a 1-percent increase in business profits corresponded with only a 0.3 percent increase in workers' wages. One of the biggest culprits in this is the corporate tax rate. It is

what causes that disconnect between corporate profits and workers' wages.

When a company decides whether and where to invest in new buildings, equipment, and research, they look at the tax rate to know what return is needed to make that investment profitable. The higher the tax, the higher the needed return. So companies facing higher taxes either don't invest at all or they invest in another country. That is why experts say that workers bear 45 percent to 75 percent of the burden of corporate taxes, because businesses invest in them less and less, the higher the tax. It is as if the corporate tax rate casts a shadow on the entire economy.

We can see that shadow here. This is the way economists model the market for capital—factories, equipment, buildings, IP. The higher the price, the less the companies demand. The lower the price, the more the companies demand. This is a simple concept.

Suppliers of those things are the reverse. If they have to sell at a low price, they don't make very much, but if they can sell at a high price, they make more. These two should meet in the middle, but they don't meet in the middle today because the government has come in and imposed a corporate tax. So each unit of capital costs more than it should because of this tax system. That means businesses only want this much. The producers only get this much. The government takes the rest.

What is left? We can see right here what the government is taking. We can see the effect that taxes have on the economy. What is left is this dark-shaded triangle. This is what economists call deadweight loss. That is the stuff that doesn't happen because of the tax. This is the tax shadow—the deadweight loss. It is deadweight in our economy. In that shadow, business activity just doesn't happen, and workers just don't get the capital they need to be more productive.

Remember, businesses are deciding whether and where to invest that next dollar. If the cost is too high—reflected here—they won't invest, at least not here in the United States. They will decide not to expand at all, or they will expand in a country that has a lower tax rate, or they will simply shut down entirely.

I don't think the American people would be surprised by this. This is not news to them. They lived this for a long time. They know it well. They know businesses are not expanding here. They have seen businesses close. They have seen a slowdown in the startup of new businesses. They know wages haven't gone up in many years.

They understand this shadow. Businesses don't expand. Workers are laid off. Money moves abroad. It is because of this high tax that doesn't leave us with decreases in costs, creating a deadweight loss on our economy. They understand it, and they know that corporations pass that tax on to them in the form of lower wages.

But here is the good news. Help is on the way. Lowering the corporate tax rate lowers the rate of return needed to make investments work. It removes the shadow that blocks the economic sunlight. Suddenly businesses are operating here in the green.

More investment in factories, buildings, equipment, and IP means more Americans are more productive, and that makes total sense. You get more done when you have a new computer than when you have an old clunky one. You produce more when you have a new machine on the line. Workers become more productive, and the companies pay them more both because they are bringing in more and because they want to keep those workers to do more. That is what happens when you lift that economic shadow that we talked about that corporate taxes impose and cast on our economy. You create more jobs, and wage competition grows income.

This isn't just economic theory. As you can see here on this chart, wage increases are significantly higher in countries with lower corporate tax rates. We don't need just simple economic theory; we need economic results, and that is what this chart shows us. High-tax countries like the United States have weak wage growth. The United States is down here on this chart representing the highest statutory corporate rate countries. High-tax countries like the United States have weak wage growth—less than 1 percent, even close to zero percent. You can see that here. Low-tax countries—these are the lowest statutory corporate rate countries. These are the bottom 10 lowest rates. Low-tax-rate countries see a wage growth of 1 percent, 1.5 percent, 3.5 percent, even 4 percent, and that is because they don't live under that economic dead weight, that tax shadow, that deadweight loss zone of high corporate taxes.

It also matches my experience in talking with companies in Colorado. U.S. multinational corporations doing business in Colorado have told me that they want to expand here, but they just can't justify it when they look at the tax rates we have here versus around the world, especially in Europe. I have even heard from some foreign-based companies that do business in Colorado that this sort of reform—I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, it would entice them to invest more in the United States. This is real, and the American people need it.

It is good television to say that it is absurd to think that American families will get more money from lowering the corporate rate than the tax raised in revenue, but it is wrong. It is tempting to look at a stash of corporate profits and think that corporations just must not want to invest here or "let's just take that money," but that is wrong

too. The right move is to create the tax environment that tells businesses that they should invest here because they can make more money. That is why President Obama called for corporate tax reform. That is why former Treasury Secretary—and one of President Obama's economic advisers—Larry Summers said that reducing the corporate tax rate and lowering the competitive disadvantage faced by American multinationals is "about as close to a free lunch as tax reformers will ever get." That is what we do by lowering the tax rate. That is how American families end up with \$4,000 more in their pockets—and not just one time; once this fully takes effect, that increase is permanent.

Mr. President, we have a historic opportunity. The American people need and deserve a new and better Tax Code, a modern one designed for today's world, not an Atari world or a Ford LTD world.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join with us as we modernize our Tax Code and deliver real results for the American people.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, a few moments from now, we are going to come to this Chamber to vote on the nomination of Peter Robb to serve as general counsel for the National Labor Relations Board.

Quite frankly, if we allow this individual to be confirmed, it will be a severe slap in the face to American workers. This is an individual who has made a career out of attacking the ability of American workers to get a fair share of the wealth they create. Yet here is a proposal to put him in a leadership position at an agency whose purpose is to fight to make sure workers get fair treatment. How does it make sense to take someone who has fought to undermine the ability of workers his entire life and put that person in charge of making sure American workers are treated fairly? Certainly, it is exactly the opposite of the argument Candidate Trump made when he said he was going to stand up for American workers. When push comes to shove, the President wants to shove workers down into the ditch.

It boils down to this: The National Labor Relations Board was established 82 years ago in the middle of the Great Depression to protect workers by encouraging and promoting their right to collective bargaining. Think of the power of association so that workers can have the opportunity to have a fair share, to have a basic foundation for their families to thrive. That ability of workers to organize has been behind every advancement we have made as a middle class in America. Be it the 40-hour workweek, safe working conditions, standard benefits, each and every advance was led by workers' ability to organize. Yet here the President wants to put in place an individual who

has done everything possible to take away that right, that ability to weigh in for basic fundamental fairness for workers.

The responsibility of the National Labor Relations Board is more important today than ever. We have seen the impact of policies on behalf of the privileged and the powerful—incomes stagnating while the wealthiest Americans see their riches grow right up to the skyline. We have seen that anti-worker forces throughout our country have led an assault in State after State after State against the right of workers to organize and to secure safe working conditions and fair wages.

Here we are at a time when America's workers have seen four decades in which their wages have been flat or declining while the rich and powerful have stripped off the growing wealth of this Nation for themselves. Income inequality has soared, wealth inequality is massive, and here is one more person being nominated to accentuate that inequality in wealth and in income.

Back in 1981, Mr. Robb was lead attorney on the case to decertify the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization. The union was striking, and Mr. Robb helped President Reagan break that strike, which resulted in the firing of 11,000 striking workers and, as a commentator at the time said, forever "undermined the bargaining of American workers and their labor unions."

When he last worked on the team at NLRB, this nominee was present for decisions that—and this is recounted in a book called "Right Turn"—"[a]ltered long-standing policy . . . narrowing the scope of activities subject to traditional National Labor Relations Board protections; broadening the permissible range of employer conduct in union representation campaigns; lowering the costs to employers of unlawful activity; and otherwise narrowing or excusing the employer to make changes subject to bargaining without informing unions before the change was made, or by permitting employers wider latitude to end the bargaining process by declaring impasse."

More recently, Mr. Robb represented Dominion Energy and successfully defeated a union organizing drive at the Millstone Power Station, bragging on his firm's website that he was able to delay the election for "more than two years after the day the petition was filed."

As many of you know, he does not want workers to have a fair chance to vote on organizing a union or to work to press for a first contract or to seek fair wages. He has spent his career fighting against workers having that fair shot and defending companies against allegations from union members regarding unfair labor practices—all kinds of unfair labor practices, including age and sex discrimination. Never once in this long career has he been on the side of the American worker—not once; therefore, he has no place

at the head of an organization intended to support the ability of workers to organize and to press for a fair share.

It is unthinkable that this nominee would ever even come to this Chamber. It is certainly part of an endless stream of attacks by the rich and powerful on working Americans that have kept their wages flat and declining for four decades. When are we going to see an end to this sort of oppression by the powerful class against the workers of the United States of America?

There is one act after another by this administration—President Trump and his team—undermining fair wages for workers in this Nation. It is outrageous. This nomination is outrageous, and I encourage my colleagues to vote no.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

#### NOMINATION OF WILLIAM WEHRUM

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, President Trump has been in office now for more than 9 months. He has laid out his agenda to cut punishing regulations, to grow the economy, and to help hard-working Americans.

President Trump's administration has already taken important steps to roll back the regulatory rampage of the last 8 years. During the last administration, the Environmental Protection Agency issued harmful and punishing, overreaching regulations that hurt workers in my home State of Wyoming.

According to the chamber of commerce, from 2008 to 2016, the EPA issued regulations that cost our economy over \$60 billion each year—significantly more than any other Federal agency. These rules had real-life impacts. The Obama administration's so-called Clean Power Plan would have closed powerplants and cost America jobs. We can have both clean air and a growing economy. We have proven it.

My goal is to make American energy as clean as we can, as fast as we can, without raising costs on American families. President Trump shares that goal. That is why EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has led the charge in cutting redtape. The EPA has taken important steps to roll back the Clean Power Plan and other punishing EPA regulations.

It is interesting. The annual cost of high-impact rules by agencies from 2008 to 2016—there were 13 rules by the EPA—in the red right here, billions and billions and billions—over \$60 billion.

Administrator Pruitt needs his full leadership team in place at the Agency to complete the task, so today the Senate is going to vote on cloture so we can consider the nomination of Bill Wehrum. He has been nominated to serve as EPA's Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation. Mr. Wehrum has more than three decades of experience in environmental policy. He has worked as an environmental engineer, a public servant at the EPA, and is an environmental

lawyer. His time at the EPA includes 2 years of service as the Acting Administrator of the Office of Air and Radiation—the same office he has now been nominated to lead.

EPA's Office of Air and Radiation is critically important in terms of a division within the Agency. It develops national programs, policies, and regulations for limiting air pollution and radiation exposure. One of the responsibilities of this office is implementing the Clean Air Act, and it is a big job.

Here is a chart. Most EPA regulatory burdens come from EPA air regulations; 94.5 percent from the Office of Air and Radiation regulatory burden in 2014; only 5.5 percent from all other EPA offices' regulatory burden of that same year. So under the Obama administration, the air office was one of the biggest regulatory abusers. According to the Office of Management and Budget, the EPA's air regulations were responsible for 95 percent of the cost of the Agency's regulations. Now Mr. Wehrum is going to play a key role in undoing this redtape.

The American people need a qualified leader in the EPA air office. Bill Wehrum is the right man for the job. Don't take my word for it; former environmental Obama Justice official John Cruden said this of Mr. Wehrum: "I believe he is committed to achieving clean air for all citizens and carefully following sound and current science." Marcus Peacock, an EPA Deputy Administrator during the Bush administration, praised Mr. Wehrum, saying that his "understanding of the Clean Air Act may be second to none. His desire to pull up his sleeves and actually make the Clean Air Act work as a practical matter is second to none."

Mr. Wehrum's expertise and experience will be tremendously helpful as he pursues policies that will protect America's air, undo regulatory overreach, and allow our economy to grow. I urge all Senators to vote for cloture on Mr. Wehrum's nomination.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, as President Trump continues to undermine worker protections and prioritize corporate profits, it is very critical that the NLRB is independent and is committed to promoting collective bargaining.

When corporations try to take advantage of their employees, workers should be able to turn to the NLRB to intervene. Unfortunately, Mr. Robb's career as a corporate lawyer fighting against workers gives me great concern he will not have workers' best interest at heart in this role. So I will be voting no on this nomination, and I urge my colleagues to stand up for workers and do the same.

I yield back our time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Robb nomination?

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL), and the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Kansas (Mr. ROBERTS) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) and the Senator from Montana (Mr. TESTER) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 49, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 266 Ex.]

#### YEAS—49

Alexander	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Graham	Risch
Boozman	Grassley	Rounds
Burr	Hatch	Rubio
Capito	Heller	Sasse
Cassidy	Hoeven	Scott
Cochran	Inhofe	Shelby
Collins	Isakson	Strange
Corker	Johnson	Sullivan
Cornyn	Kennedy	Thune
Cotton	Lankford	Tillis
Crapo	Lee	Toomey
Daines	McCain	Wicker
Enzi	McConnell	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Murkowski	

#### NAYS—46

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Nelson
Bennet	Harris	Peters
Blumenthal	Hassan	Reed
Booker	Heinrich	Sanders
Brown	Heitkamp	Schatz
Cantwell	Hirono	Schumer
Cardin	Kaine	Shaheen
Carper	King	Stabenow
Casey	Klobuchar	Udall
Coons	Leahy	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Warner
Donnelly	Markey	Warren
Duckworth	McCaskey	Whitehouse
Durbin	Merkley	Wyden
Feinstein	Murphy	
Franken	Murray	

#### NOT VOTING—5

Cruz	Paul	Tester
Menendez	Roberts	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 2 minutes of debate, equally divided.

The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the nomination of William Wehrum to be EPA's Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation.